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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

" Seared at thy frown terrific, fly
Self-pleasing Folly's idle brood,
Wild laughter, noise, and thoughtless joy,
And leave us leisure to be good."

GRAY : *Ode to Adversity.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

CHAPTER I.

Yet see, how all around them wait,
The ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train !
Ah, show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murderous band !

Ode on a distant view of Eton College.

EVERY circumstance connected with that scene is stamped on my memory in characters that, I think, will never be effaced. I still see Jacintha's look of anguish and Mr. Herne's silent concern—I still hear Marian's choking sobs, and see her kneeling beside the inanimate little form.

While yet overwhelmed with sorrow, I was summoned to receive the poor mother, and break the sad news to her—how *can* such news be broken? the mind leaps forward to receive it, and then reels under the shock.

To communicate it to the girls was a lighter task, yet painful enough—it fell to the lot of Jacintha, for Marian was so choking with sobs that she could not sufficiently control herself. I was obliged to consign her to poor Hawkins, who now crept about, for I could not leave Mrs. Field, and Jacintha could not leave the girls, only three of whom were convalescent. Our seven had already been reduced to six; and, before nightfall, they were only five, for Mrs. Fox having returned, had sent her servant to inquire, and the servant had carried back a report of Lucy's death; on which Mrs. Fox, giving way to her feelings; without allowing her reason the least exercise, came to us with all speed in a fly, and insisted on instantly

carrying home “her dear child, her darling Matilda,” wrapped in blankets, from what she called “our infected house,” though if it were infected, it was by the poor child herself, who now was nearly well, and might as safely have been wrapped in a shawl as in a blanket. But then there would not have been a scene; and some people like scenes; and Mrs. Fox made much more of one than Mrs. Field, who kept quietly wiping her eyes by the fire. I was disturbed at losing another pupil—when we had had all the real trouble of her illness, too!—but was not sorry to have our immediate responsibilities diminished by her removal; and was heartily glad to see the last of the hysterical fine lady, her mother.

“How some people give way to their feelings!” I could not help saying to the meek-looking little woman in widow’s mourning, who was drying her red eyes by the fire-side. “*You*

have been heavily and unexpectedly bereaved ; but ‘whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,’ and great as your loss is, you are able, even already, to kiss the hand that smites, and to own that your sweet little girl has a better portion allotted her than any you could provide for her in this sorrowful world.”

“I *own* it, but I can’t *feel* it,” said the poor mother, weeping. “Oh, pray for me, Miss Middlemass, for my heart seems locked !”

“I will, I will !” said I ; and, kneeling down, I began to offer up what I meant to be only a few words of entreaty for submission and composure, but somehow the subject grew upon me, and I became more and more fervent in supplication, while the poor mother, kneeling close beside me, checked her sobs and closed my prayer with a hearty Amen.

On rising from my knees, I saw Fanny Ward doing the same ; and she then timidly stole up

to Mrs. Field and stroked her hand. Thinking her artless comfortings might suffice for awhile, I went to look after the rest of the house, and found Jacintha in quest of me.

“I sent Fanny for you,” said she, “and wondered you did not come. Is the undertaker still to be sent for?”

“Fanny found me engaged in prayer with poor Mrs. Field,” said I, “and, instead of interrupting, knelt down too.”

“A dear girl she is,” said Jacintha. “She has been talking so nicely to the Duncans and to Marian! I can’t think where she has picked up some of the things she has said—they did not seem the fruit of such a young mind. But Mrs. Field—”

“Mrs. Field wishes the removal to take place after dark. She says we are very kind, but she does not feel this to be like home. Her sister is summoned to meet her there, so perhaps it

will be best for her as well as for us. I am now going up with her to poor Lucy."

"Don't call her poor Lucy," said Jacintha, with a look of grief. "She is better off than any of us. I am sure I would change with her." And she hurried away.

I found Mrs. Field on her way from the drawing-room, attended by Fanny, who reminded me of Ruth supporting Naomi. We silently went up to the chamber of death, where the peaceful remains of the dear little girl, composed by the hand of affection, looked like innocence in repose. A few snowdrops lay on the white sheet, beside the scarcely less white hands. There was an inexpressible smile on her lips—her lineaments were all beauty, and she looked asleep rather than dead. Hawkins stood reverently beside her, with folded hands; and Marian, on the other side of the bed, sat looking fixedly at the fair little face,

with eyes that could weep no more. Fanny's arm was presently round her waist, and she gently drew her away, to make room for the bereaved mother.

In the darkness of wintry, starless night, little Lucy's remains were quietly removed. Mrs. Field's sister had fortunately answered the summons so promptly that she was able to accompany her home, which was a great relief to me, as I could not bear her going alone, and yet none of us were well enough to venture out with prudence.

When they were gone, I felt ready to say, with old Cosmo de Medici, "This is too large a house for so small a family!" There were now only Fanny Ward, Bessy Unwin, and Clara Hughes in the school-room. Miss Dixon was convalescent, but very weak, and remained upstairs to nurse the two Duncans. Marian had such an intense headache that she reluctantly

went to bed early ; and Jacintha, after a vain attempt at lessons, had said—

“My dears, I think you must consider this a half-holiday, though a very sorrowful one. Employ yourselves in any way you like—I know I can trust you.”

I believe they availed themselves of this to do little enough. I had glimpses of them now and then, leaning on their elbows on the window-seat, or sitting over the fire, talking in subdued voices. It does not harm children to take part now and then, in this way, in the cares and sorrows of others. If we keep such things too much out of their sight, they will, on their entrance into life, be children still.

But I did not wish them to mope. Therefore, when the removal of poor little Lucy's remains had taken place, and the house was hushed and still, I went in to them and said,

“Come and sit with me, dears, now, in my room.” Bessy and Clara immediately obeyed with gladness; Fanny Ward had crept off to Marian; and Jacintha, glad to be off duty at last, threw herself on the comfortable black horsehair sofa, which still occupied its old place, directly we left her in possession of the dining-room. I knew she would like solitude and rest beyond anything else; and, as for me—it was all in the day’s work, and I was fond of children. So we did not—

“Sit upon the ground,
And tell strange stories of the deaths of kings;”

but we spoke of little Lucy affectionately and naturally, and told one another little traits we had observed of her goodness, and the children asked me certain questions about things that awed and puzzled them, and I explained away some of their vague terrors concerning what are only the trappings of death, and spoke

to them lovingly and hopefully of heavenly rewards and earthly privileges, responsibilities, and duties, and the goodness of the blessed Saviour in dying that all who believed in him might be saved—and sent them to bed, serious but not sad.

At dead of night I was aroused from sleep by Marian, who stood beside me in her night-clothes, saying—

“Isabella! Isabella!—I want to go to church! I want to go to church!”

Although her eyes were wide open, they were fixed on vacancy, and I knew directly that she was not herself. Springing up hastily, I took her hand, and said—

“It is not church-time yet, dearest, and the snow is on the ground. We will wait till to-morrow morning.”

“Oh, to-morrow morning may never come,” said she, with that dreary, dreaming

look which Flaxman has given Clytemnestra awaking the Furies. "Who knows what to-morrow may bring forth? And your hand is hot—so hot! While *I* . . . Cold, cold as death!" And she shuddered.

"You are dreaming, dearest Marian," said I. "You have been overwrought, and are disquieted. Come, lie down by me"—and I would have drawn her down beside me, but she shivered, and said, "Oh, no! oh, no!"

"Come back then to your own nice warm bed," said I, putting my arm round her waist. "Let me lead you back to Fanny Ward—good little Fanny—you love dear little Fanny?"

She seemed touched by my endearing tones, and said, "Little Fanny? Oh, yes; little Fanny."

I led her back to her bed, saying, gently and cheerfully, "Why, how funny little Fanny will think it if she wakes and finds you are

gone!—how she will wonder where you are, will not she?”

She answered with a ghastly smile, and dropped on her bed as if quite exhausted by some preternatural effort. Fanny, who had just awoke, looked at her and then at me in silent wonder, but I laid my finger on my lips and gave a little nod, which the good girl understood, and she lay down beside her companion, putting her arm protectingly over her. Both closed their eyes; and after watching over them a minute or two, I returned, chilled to the heart, to bed.

I lay awake, pondering what this might mean. Was it merely the effect of fatigue and anxiety, or was it the prelude to some sad catastrophe? I thought over all that Marian had done since the first opening of our school, and it seemed amazing that she had not broken down long before! No labour

like head-labour! And her every faculty of body and mind had constantly been on the full stretch, to their utmost powers of tension, and now their attenuated cords had burst! What if her mind had received an irreparable injury? How could Jacintha and I have been so inhuman, so infatuated, so stupid and selfish as to let her peril her dear life so?

Then I hoped I was needlessly alarming myself, and that in the morning I should find her mind restored by refreshing sleep. Yet I could not but remember how early delirium had been one of little Lucy's most remarkable symptoms. Meanwhile, I was conscious of having taken a severe chill, and of having acute pains all over me. I supposed my turn was coming next, and thought I could bear it with indifference, except for the being incapacitated from usefulness. I commended my case, the case of the whole house, very

earnestly and piteously to God, in doing which I fell asleep.

I was awoke, at morning dawn, by Fanny Ward, who, with looks of dismay, said, "Oh, Miss Middlemass—I can't tell what to think of her!" and burst into tears.

In spite of my chill overnight, and the aches and pains that sharply reminded me of it, I could not, would not dress, more than by putting on my warm flannel dressing-gown and furred slippers. Hastily following Fanny to her bedside, I found Marian lying with her eyes open, looking very much flushed, and talking very fast.

"Good morning, Isabella," said she, "why, one would think it was June, and yet it is only January—I think so, is not it?" and then she ran over the names of the months. "How droll you look! Your hair is all rough, and I see Brazil beetles creeping all over you

—pretty, shining creatures, all green and gold !”

I saw how the case was, and went immediately to tell Jacintha, with whom I found Hawkins. They both wept when I told them, and Jacintha began to dress very fast. Hawkins hurried down stairs, to send the errand-boy (whom we had taken on in default of better help) for Mr. Herne.

“ Oh, if she dies !” said Jacintha, wringing her hands.

“ Hush ! not a word of it,” said I, “ or you will make me useless. Miss Dixon is, I think, well enough to look after the girls to-day ; Hawkins will sit with the Duncans, and you and I will alternately be with Marian.”

In fact, we hardly left her room, and, fortunately, we were very little wanted out of it. Lessons were out of the question, except such as Bessy and Clara thought fit to learn

of their own accord, and repeat to Miss Dixon ; but they employed themselves one way or another, I was afterwards told, not only inoffensively but meritoriously, being very desirous to show by their good conduct how much they sympathized with us all, and pitied Marian.

Mr. Herne came speedily, and did not conceal from me that it was a very bad case. People will remember that delirium was a striking and fatal symptom in many who died of the influenza of 1837. She was not delirious always, *at first* ; and we could bring her from her wanderings by reading the Psalms to her, which she would often repeat after us. But continuous reading, even of this sort, soon became unsupportable to her, so that we could only resort to it with extreme caution. What a miserable day it was ! and I, all the while, provoked with myself for being unable to

ignore my own pains; and for cowering in draughts, and being obliged to hack, and clear my throat, at the risk of disturbing Marian.

Dear angel! she was almost past disturbing, being very little cognizant of anything that went on around her. Fanny bathed her burning forehead with diluted spirits of wine, hour after hour,—lifting off one heated rag and laying on another, refreshingly cool, as delicately as the most practised hand could have done. No nursing like that of genuine affection! It was impossible to get that child away from her; and after a time, we forbore to try it; I silently thinking within myself she was unconsciously laying up a store of heart-experience that would be invaluable to her throughout life, and place her character thenceforth on a higher platform.

At night, this young creature wanted to sit up with Marian! And when I imperatively,

though not unkindly, said "No," her tears flowed so bitterly that she was forced to go out into the corridor. I followed her and kissed her, and at length was obliged to say, "Well, my love, you shall sit up to-morrow night, if dear Marian requires it."

"*If?*" repeated Fanny, taking my words in their worst sense, and bursting out afresh.

"I did not mean that," said I, deeply moved, and leading her into my own room. "Go to bed here, my dear girl, you cannot sleep with Marian to-night. Jacintha is lying down now in her own room, after having made me faithfully promise to wake her at twelve o'clock. I shall then come and be a companion to you. God bless you, my dear, dear girl! Remember Marian fervently in your prayers. That is an effectual way of being of service to her, and one that will bring down a blessing on your own head. I love you dearly, Fanny! Good night, dear girl!"

CHAPTER II.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform ;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

JOHN NEWTON.

I RETREATED with my little writing-case in my hand, and at Marian's bedside wrote John an account of our varied trials, and of this our heaviest trial of all. Then it occurred to me that the promised bulletin to Mrs. Duncan had been forgotten, and I penned a cheering account of her girls, and mentioned little Lucy's death and Marian's illness, without appealing to her feelings more than I could help. When this little task was over,

I folded my hands, meditated, and offered many a short and voiceless, but fervent prayer.

Hawkins persisted in sitting up the whole night—she said, “it never hurt her.” I would gladly have borne her company, but my influenza-cold was very heavy, and Jacintha had so strenuously insisted on my going to bed at twelve o’clock, that I could not break the promise she had extorted. At the appointed time, I roused her as gently as I could from the uneasy slumber: she started up at my first touch, saying, “How is she now?”

“Just beginning to be restless. She has been lying very quiet, but with her eyes always wide open, though she does not notice anything.”

“Good night, dear Isabella.”

“You will be *sure* to call me, if there is the smallest change.”

“Depend upon me.”

We kissed each other affectionately.

I was glad to find Fanny asleep, though with a tear on her cheek. I listened long and anxiously to the distinctly audible sound of Marian's voice in her delirium. At length, it ceased. Worn out and ill, I slept—then, with a start, awoke, at the sound, as I thought, of a scream and a scuffle. I went softly to her door: it was locked. I listened—all was still—just as I was going, I thought I heard some one moving about, and a heavy sigh. It was not a warrant for disturbing those within, and I returned to bed.

In the cold grey morning light I woke and saw Hawkins beside me, looking heavy-eyed and worn. As Fanny still slept, I whispered, "What sort of a night?"

"A very poor one, ma'am," she returned, shaking her head—"a *very* poor one."

"I will come directly," said I, hastily dress-

ing myself. Hawkins assisted me as much as she could, and then went away, I soon following her.

I never saw Jacintha look so haggard: Marian, on the contrary, had a brilliant colour, and her eyes were like stars. She was talking as fast as ever, and I vainly endeavoured to check her. At length I took up her prayer-book, and began to read the Twenty-third Psalm. Immediately she hushed. Jacintha and I exchanged glances, and Jacintha noiselessly left the room. When I had finished that psalm I began another, but she exclaimed, "Oh no, no!" and pressed her hand to her forehead, with a look of pain. I desisted. Just then I heard the sound of our muffled knocker, presently followed by Mr. Herne's quiet tread on the stairs. It was full early. Jacintha, who had luckily not undressed, opened the bedroom door and came in with

him. He was a nice, fresh-coloured man, generally, but he now looked inexpressibly harassed. I pitied him, for I thought he perhaps had other patients as ill or worse than Marian; but I afterwards heard from his wife that she had never known him so interested as in this particular case.

We mutually saluted each other, and I rose to give him my seat by the bed, which he took. Gently placing his hand on Marian's, he said—

“Do you know me?”

She sweetly replied—

“Yes, you are Mr. Herne.”

“Are you better?”

“No.”

“Well, I think you are. You must try and get well.”

“I shall never get well.”

There was a pause.

“Do you think you can eat anything to-day?”

“Perhaps.”

“A mutton-chop?”

She shuddered.

“A little bread-and-milk, then?”

“Yes, I think I shall like that.”

“You shall have it, then. Good-bye.”

I followed him out. We went into a little dressing-room, where we were joined by Jacintha, who left Hawkins in her place.

“She says,” said Jacintha, with eyes full of tears, “that she knows you think she will not recover, you looked so blank when you felt her pulse.”

“God only knows!” replied he, deeply moved. “Her pulse is almost gone. You must try to get her to take a teaspoonful of port wine.”

“How often?”

“ Every ten minutes, if you will, till we can raise her pulse. What of her night ? ”

Jacintha faltered, and looked towards me, as if she dreaded giving me pain.

There *had* been a scuffle and a scream. Marian had sprung out of bed, wildly crying, “ They’re calling me ! ” and Jacintha, with the utmost difficulty, held her back, on which Marian screamed, and pushed Jacintha so violently, that she fell and struck her head against the table ; while Marian, exhausted, fell back motionless on her bed, and was in that state tended by Jacintha and Hawkins when I tried the door. Hawkins, who had been dozing by the fire, was aroused by Marian’s scream, and hastened to turn the key.

Jacintha’s tears burst forth as she spoke. She said—

“ I meant for the best ! ”

“ For the best ? —to be sure you did ! ” said

Mr. Herne, warmly. "Your conduct is devoted! admirable!" and much more to the same purport, which called the colour into poor Jacintha's pale cheeks. I, too, came in for my share, and listened in silent wonder, not seeing the drift of such unqualified commendations, nor how they were called for. I am now convinced that he as completely designed his praise to be a temporary support and stimulant to us, as the port wine to poor Marian.

Jacintha, cheered up for the moment, returned to her post. I remained to talk things over with him a little longer, and to accompany him to see the little Duncans, whom he pronounced well enough to go down stairs after breakfast. He spoke cheerfully to them, shook my hand warmly, said in an under tone that he should look in on us again later in the day, and departed.

I leant over the banisters to see if any servant were in waiting to open the door for him. I saw Hawkins step forward to do so, and heard her tremulous question of "Any hope, sir?"

"Very little, I fear," was his reply in a guarded under tone, "but I must keep up the spirits of her poor sisters." And then he went home to lay his arms on the table, his wife afterwards told me, and lay his head on his arms and shed tears.

My heart sank at those words, but I dared not give way. I went into my room, and, before Fanny could get the start, said—

"Fanny, my dear, I am going to put a great charge on your young shoulders."

"Oh, what is it, please?" said she, with brightening looks.

"To make breakfast for *all* of us. It will be an arduous task, but one, I am sure, you

can fulfil. Here is the key of the tea-caddy. You will take the head of the table, and Clara and Bessy will, I am sure, give as little trouble as possible ; and you will send up three breakfast cups of tea to my dressing-room, and three to Miss Dixon and the Miss Duncans, who will come down stairs after breakfast."

Fanny looked proud and pleased.

"May I not first —" she began.

"No, dear, it will not be convenient for you to see her just now. *I* am going to sit with her quite quietly, and no one else is to be in the room. Mr. Herne has seen her, and told her he thinks her better," added I, not quite honestly, for I knew he had said what he did not think, "and we will hope it may prove true."

There was still dinner to order, and Miss Dixon to speak to, before I could release Jacintha. The first was easily done—mutton-

broth, beef-tea, bread-pudding. I called Miss Dixon into my little dressing-room, and said—

“You are going down stairs to-day, my dear Miss Dixon, after a long confinement; but you will be duly careful of yourself, I know (pressing her hand), if you remember that your health is valuable to *us* as well as to yourself.”

“Oh, Miss Middlemass!”

“Yes, my dear Miss Dixon, *very* valuable; and the more so, because at the present time the whole burthen of the school-room must literally devolve on you. Luckily, at present, it is very light; and you may make it as much lighter as you like. Just keep the children employed and quiet, without much troubling them or yourself; I leave all to your good judgment with perfect confidence.”

“Everything in my power to do, I am

sure shall be done," said Miss Dixon, looking flattered. "They used to say at home that I was not —very bright, you know" (lowering her voice), "so that, indeed, Miss Middlemass, I feel the distinction of your confidence all the more."

"*You* will read prayers this morning," said I, again pressing her hand, and then left her. I quietly took Jacintha's place, begging her, as soon as she had breakfasted, to lie down for a few hours, and assuring her I had arranged everything below, so that neither of us would be wanted. She looked thankful, and departed.

When I sat down beside Marian, I said, "Try to close your eyes, dearest." She did; but, alas! those large, unsleeping orbs were soon fixed on me again in unnatural brightness. She said, smiling, "Cannot you look more cheerful?"

Oh, I cannot go on ! I hardly know how the next few days went. I know she became worse instead of better. I know we became so worn out, that we could hardly stand, hardly speak, hardly keep awake, and yet we felt we must. I remember Mr. Herne's thinking her hair must be cut off, and my piteous, " Oh, don't ! " and then my thinking what folly and sin it was to put any disfigurement in competition with her life, and volunteering to cut it off, and his sighing and saying, " No need ! "

I saw he despaired : all my faith and hope in human skill vanished as he departed ; and yet, two hours after, we were sending an urgent message to him again, and when I thought I heard him at the door, I was so impatient that I hurried down to him myself. Instead of him, it was the Reverend Mr. Barnet ! Oh, what a disappointment ! I

burst into tears, and the good man, doubtless much surprised, took my hand, and led me into the parlour.

He told me he and Mary had heard that our house was visited by grievous sickness, and that at her urgent request, he had come purposely to make inquiries, and to know whether she could be of any assistance.

And he spoke as only a good and effective minister can speak. Not such trite sayings as “all,—all must die,” such as one might expect to hear from our prosy old rector, Dr. Hook, if, indeed, he had ever troubled himself to pay a ministerial visit. Never once did I wish Dr. Hook’s shadow to fall across our door—still less that of his conceited young curate. A different minister was Mr. Barnet from either of these; and I so felt him to be the right sort of sympathizer and strengthener, that, without more ado, I dried my eyes and told

him our sad case, and begged his prayers. These he promised, and Mary's too, and he wished to know whether I were desirous he should now pray beside Marian. I was just going to answer, when a hasty, though muffled knock made me hasten from him, expecting to see Mr. Herne. Instead of him it was—John ! Poor John had travelled fast, and at great inconvenience to himself, to see Marian, as he feared, for the last time. My heart was very full, just then—receiving visitors, even such as John and Mr. Barnet, kept me from where I was wanted and wishing to be ; still, I was gratified at this proof of brotherly love, and I knew that Marian, if conscious, would be deeply gratified too. But she had not recognised us, nor spoken for many hours—only lay with her eyes half open, chanting a wailing kind of tune, that died and rose again like an Æolian harp.

I left them, and sent up to tell Jacintha. She wept, and said, "Let Mr. Barnet come up, —and John too. It may do John good to see her; and tell Mr. Barnet to begin some of the church-prayers very softly, and, if they seem to make her worse, to desist, and quietly leave the room."

I went down and did so. John looked much awed; he trod softly, and offered me his arm, saying, "So much going up and down stairs is bad for you, my poor Isabella."

I said, "When nurses begin to think of themselves before their patients, something is wrong."

He followed Mr. Barnet into the room, and silently and sadly kissed Jacintha at the door; then softly stole towards the bed. Marian was quite quiet. When Mr. Barnet said, "Peace be to this house and to all that dwell in it," I thought I perceived a little trembling of her

eyelids, but was not sure. Then Mr. Barnet said, "Let us pray," and we all knelt down—John burying his face in his hands. I could not help looking at Marian as I knelt beside her. We all made the responses in hushed voices, and joined softly in the Lord's Prayer. Once or twice, I fancied she joined; and again in one of the following responses. When Mr. Barnet had concluded the prayer beginning, "Hear us," he did not, of course, attempt the exhortation, but proceeded to that affecting and pathetic invocation, "O Saviour of the world!" and concluded with the beautiful commendatory address and benediction. When I again raised my eyes, I thrilled to meet those of Marian fixed on me in a composed manner. Mr. Barnet silently left the room. Her eyes certainly followed him a little way to the door. Then I beckoned to John, who advanced on tiptoe and bent over her. He said, softly—

“Marian, do you know who I am?”

She replied, “Yes—John—my brother!”

Jacintha burst into tears and went out. John followed her. I whispered to him, wiping my eyes, “Keep Jacintha away a little, if you can, and persuade her to get a little rest.” He nodded. Then I returned to Marian. She said, “I’m so tired!” and *shut her eyes*. We remained as we were about an hour. I had not thought a house could be so still. I believe she slept: I am sure I prayed.

Then Jacintha entered, softly followed by Mr. Herne. He did not disturb Marian, but I saw his eyelids quiver as he bent over her. He whispered, “I believe the crisis is past,” and then went away with Jacintha, who received his directions in another room.

I neither knew nor thought about what went on in other parts of the house—what had become of John, Mr. Barnet, &c. I afterwards

found they both went to dine quietly with Mr. Herne. Afterwards, John returned, and had a long talk with Jacintha. It did her good; she could talk and shed tears without restraint, and he pitied us all very much, she told me, and was very kind. He had been very much impressed by the sight of Marian; and by the solemnity of Mr. Barnet's prayer. Altogether, the effect of the scene upon him was salutary; and it was not wholly mournful, because he began to entertain a hope, as we all did with trembling, that Marian might be saved.

Fanny, who had established herself as my little factotum, went in and out of the parlour twice or thrice while John was there, and said afterwards, "I like Mr. John Middlemass very much—he seems so feeling."

This had not always been John's characteristic—indeed, he had been accounted rather the reverse; but some men, like pictures, im-

prove with years, and I think he did. Meanwhile, I was so happy ! so happy !—in spite of saying to myself, “ We must not rejoice too soon,” hope *had* dawned on my heart, and was shining more and more unto the perfect day. As for Hawkins, rivers of tears flowed down her furrowed cheeks, and often I saw her hands and eyes raised heavenwards. It seemed a sin not to utter thanksgiving ; my prayers continually took that form—and then I chastened myself, and prayed we might not yet hope in vain.

But Marian was certainly sleeping. Hour after hour she slept, and, in the middle of the night, she drank a little beef-tea. Oh, with what ecstasy I hailed her saying with a little smile, “ *C'est bien bon !* ” She immediately turned her head on her pillow again, and slept. She had now become so weakened by fever and long abstinence, that she could not move from

side to side ; but she was so light that we could lift her easily. I never can remember whether it were the fourth or fifth night of my sitting up—however that may have been, my eyes irresistibly closed towards daybreak, and I slept profoundly.

When I woke, Marian was still asleep, and Jacintha standing by me, freshly dressed and with her hair nicely arranged and her face looking many degrees less careworn. She whispered, “ John will breakfast at ‘ The White Hart,’ where he slept—he will not look in till nine, and it is now six. Go and have three hours’ comfortable rest in your own room, and trust all here to me. I have slept, and am quite refreshed.”

I complied ; only saying as I glanced towards Marian, “ How we ought to thank God ! ”

“ Oh ! ” said Jacintha, fervently, and clasped her hands, looking up. She said no more, but that expressive “ oh ” told volumes.

Fanny Ward was sitting up in bed, rubbing her eyes. She looked inquiringly at me as I entered; and when I told her that Marian seemed improving, she sprung up, threw her arms round me, and cried. Tired out with too much exertion of body and mind for so young a girl, she soon slept again, soundly, and I was soon asleep at her side.

When, after a couple of hours, I woke, I found Fanny awake before me. She said, "How pleasant it is, to wake and remember she is better!"

I said, "Ah Fanny, we have a great deal to be thankful for, but yet a great deal to dread."

"I know she will need a great deal of care taken of her," rejoined Fanny; "but please don't say *dread*, Miss Middlemass! That is so gloomy a word! and you know we are told to take no thought for the morrow, because sufficient to the day is the evil thereof."

“ True, love,” said I.

When I entered Marian’s room, and met her calm, sedate gaze, my heart swelled with gratitude, and I trusted that there was indeed no longer need of dread.

CHAPTER III.

Ye fearful souls, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are full of mercy, and will break
In blessings on your head.

JOHN NEWTON.

I HAVE dwelt too long, perhaps, on scenes that are stamped, with too painful accuracy, on my mind. But to us they were of deep, nay, of eternal moment. When such heavy seasons of visitation are among God's providential dealings with us, the soul is ploughed up, and the seed sown is for death or for life.

What a common expression it is, "It harrows up my soul!" The plough leaves the earth in great, rough lumps—the harrow rakes

them smooth, like a comb. But all the ploughing and harrowing in the world would be of very little use if the ground remained unsown. And thus great sorrows and dangers may be utterly without good effect on the mind which the heavenly Sower does not sow with his good seed. Mr. Barnet enlarged better than I can do, on this, to Fanny Ward, whom he found in the drawing-room all alone one morning, when he called to inquire. When I entered, he was saying to her,

“Would it be any use to dig and rake your little garden, do you think, if you did not sow seeds in it?”

“It would look all the neater,” said Fanny.

He smiled; and as I saw he had an answer ready for her, I begged him to go on.

“An unproductive bit of ground would not be a very pretty garden, I think,” said he: “it would hardly be worth the trouble of

digging and raking it, if we did not mean to sow it. Now, it is just so with ourselves. It pleases God sometimes to afflict people whom He loves, so severely that He may be said to plough up their very souls. Why does He do this ?”

Fanny’s heart swelled: and I think her unuttered answer was, “ I can’t tell—for *I* wouldn’t !”

“ He does it, not for the sake of giving them pain, but to prepare them to receive the good seed He intends to scatter on their souls. In Isaiah’s prophecies* you will find allusion made to this. Isaiah says, ‘ Doth the ploughman plough, *all day*, to sow? doth he open and break the clods of the ground? When he hath made plain (or smooth) the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches (or vetches) and scatter the cummin, and cast

* Chap. xxviii.

in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and rye?’ Is not that what the ploughman has been taking the trouble of ploughing all day for? And why? That it may bring forth abundantly. ‘For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him,’ even by His own example. Do you understand me?”

“I think I do,” said Fanny, hesitatingly.

“What do I mean?”

“You mean that God uses us as ploughmen use the ground, and ploughs us up with troubles that He may cast in good seed, to grow up and bring forth corn and useful things.”

“That’s the very thing! And when we *do* begin to bring forth useful things, He sees that His labour was not in vain. Then, when the grain is gathered, what comes next?”

“It is threshed.”

“Yes, with large flails. But Isaiah says little things like vetches and cummins are not threshed with flails, which would be needlessly hard for them: a staff or a rod will be sufficient.”

“‘Thy rod and thy staff,’” put in Fanny.

“Well applied.” (By this time he was holding her hand, and she was looking full into his kind, dark, penetrating eyes.) “You are a little vetch, eh?”

“Yes!”—smiling.

“But ‘bread corn is *bruised*.’ It is more valuable than vetches or cummin; and is worth the trouble, not only of threshing, but of grinding in a mill. And thus, also, doth the Lord of Hosts, who is ‘wonderful in counsel (or wisdom), and excellent in working.’ He will even grind his people, as in a mill, to get all the good out of them.”

“Oh, I see it all now!” cried Fanny, he

whole face lighting up. "He has dealt tenderly with me, like a little vetch, but he has bruised and ground the Miss Middlemasses like bread corn."

Now, how practical all this was! I no longer wondered that Mr. Barnet was popular in his parish and in his schools. I wished *I* could teach so! But God's purpose to me, at this time, was not that I should teach, but be taught, even through the medium of a child. What Mr. Barnet inculcated, in simple phrase, on Fanny, was just as instructive to me. I had felt our path dark, as she had done, and, with words of submission on my lips, had found it hard to submit with my heart. Now, I saw that God had indeed given us the dearest proof of His love, in threshing and grinding us, to be kneaded as bread for the Lord's own table. And "then, —into the oven with it!" says good old Mat-

thew Henry. There is yet a fiery ordeal for His servants to endure, before they are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

But, from this period, I date a totally different and higher feeling throughout the house—a different spirit imbuing the character of every one in the family, and permeating the simplest actions. First, for Jacintha. Dear, excellent creature as she was, there had ever been too great an alloy of this world in her composition. Too fond had she been of questioning, “What will the world think? What will the world say?” The very subjects of inquiry showed too plainly what the world is *in the habit* of thinking and saying. Its thoughts are not very wise, nor its sayings very kind. But, from this great ordeal, Jacintha’s mind seemed to have come forth like gold from the fire, purified of much of its alloy. She had had a sharp discipline; had

had long hours of night-watching for communing with her own heart, and seeking to ascertain what spirit she was of; had been brought nearer to the unseen world by following to its very brink the being she loved most dearly upon earth; had, with the gaze of intense affection, sought to pierce its mysteries; had looked around for help, but found none except in God; had sought His, not formally but agonizingly; had found prayer answered, beyond all expectations, equal to all hopes, and had overflowed with lively gratitude. Her experience was that of Job—"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye *seeth* thee!" seeth thee in every walk of life—in every mercy, every duty. And her humbled spirit was, moreover, ready to add, "Wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

Moreover, Jacintha had, naturally, been

exceedingly self-willed. “I *will* have that done!” “I *insist* upon this!” “I will not endure this!”—“I won’t submit to it!”—were no uncommon words with her. Now the lion spirit was chained: her will was bent to His. I say not the lion was slain, or the will annihilated—but I say that “Thy will, *not mine*, be done,” was now the prayer of her heart. And a hard heart-prayer it is.

On the whole, when I look back on what Jacintha had been up to the time of our reverses and afflictions—first, her disappointment about Mr. Mortlake—then, her undue hastiness and severity in the case of Emma Grove—then, the gall and wormwood of having to encounter at disadvantage the sneering Mrs. Callender and the gruff Mr. Grove—then, the falling off of the school—then, the anxiety of the first weeks of general illness in the house—and then, to crown all and throw every foregone evil into the shade, the distressing illness

and expected death of Marian,—when I look back on all this catalogue of griefs, and on what Jacintha had been, and on what she began to be and has gone on being from that sad time,—I feel that *the prize was worth the race* a thousand times ! and that were it on her account alone, Marian's illness was a blessing !

But, if to her, how much more so to Marian ? She had always been the darling of our hearts—the pride of our eyes—the pet of the house—the beloved of all our friends : but yet, “there is none that sinneth not,” and even Marian required to be tried as silver is tried, seven times in the fire. So pure, so spiritual, had she ever appeared to *us*, that *we*, poor misjudging sinners as we were, could hardly believe our darling required that searching discipline : but surely she knew herself best ; and in hours of holy, unfettered confidence, she has since told me that she never knew the depths of her

own heart till then, nor had had any adequate idea how much it required cleansing.

In her daily mien, there was less alteration to mark than in Jacintha's, because it had always been, to human eyes, so irreproachable; but yet, we were all sensible of a difference—we all were conscious, for some time, that, in ministering to her, in communing with her, we were on holy ground. There was a sanctity in her looks, demeanour, and simplest expressions, such as one would think there must have been, in the apostolic times, in those who in the name or by the word of Jesus were raised from the dead. Doubtless, they gradually returned to their ordinary avocations; but, surely, not in their ordinary spirit.

I wish I could report as much good to my worthless self as to my beloved sisters, derived from this corrective dispensation. I think it showed me the greatness of many things com-

monly considered small, and the smallness of many things commonly accounted great, more forcibly than before. I certainly seemed to acquire a new view of the scope and end of life, and to perceive great deficiencies in a course I had hitherto regarded as tolerably blameless. Altogether, earthly things had paled, and heavenly things had brightened. Moreover, although at the time, my bodily sufferings had been much increased by illness and fatigue, so that it was some time before I altogether shook off my influenza symptoms and recovered from my exertions, yet, in some respects, those exertions and the unavoidable neglect of many old-established habits had done me good. For instance, my lameness was decidedly better: I had stumped up and down stairs and out of one room into another without regard to pain, and now the pain had become very little, and my muscles, forced into use, had regained a power

which I saw no reason for allowing them to lose again. Also I had become careless of sitting in draughts, and of many other old-maidish and invalid habits, which, if indulged in, are apt to get inveterate.

However, there is no good in boasting ; and self-praise is no recommendation. *Laus Deo.*

I must speak a word of Miss Dixon, who had been head schoolmistress all this time, and who had acquired a self-possession and decision of character she never afterwards lost. She was conscious the trial had been beneficial to her, and spoke of it very nicely.

But what shall I say of dear Fanny Ward ? We were afraid of harming her by letting her see how very much we thought of her ; and yet, I believe, it crept out. It may be thought strange that Fanny was not sent home in the first instance : but Mrs. Ward's younger children had the measles, which she was par-

ticularly desirous Fanny should escape ; and afterwards, when Fanny had recovered from her own very moderate attack of influenza, there was no question of sending her home ; she herself would have been in despair at the thought of it. When Mrs. Ward was sufficiently relieved from her home anxieties to come and see how we were, she was much shocked to hear all we had gone through, and much affected and pleased to hear how excellently Fanny had behaved, and how she had shown the forethought and sense of a woman, and been a real help and comfort to me. I told Mrs. Ward that though it was a discipline neither of us would willingly have exposed her to, I believed it had ripened her best qualities and deepened her religious feelings in a way that would benefit her during the remainder of her life. Mrs. Ward took my view of it, and even thanked me for letting Fanny be of use to me

instead of confining her to the school-room, saying—

“After all, Miss Middlemass, what is it that these children are training for but the duties of active life? and how much less important is it that they should have a few lessons more or less in music and French, than that they should have their wits about them, and know how to act in times of sickness and danger?”

Fanny heard these concluding words, which I was not sorry for; and they were accompanied by an affectionate kiss. John remained a couple of days at the “White Hart,” to be quite sure that Marian was really out of danger, and then returned to town. He saw Mr. Barnet twice, and was very much pleased with him—pronounced him “gentlemanlike,” without which there could be no door to John’s liking; and “scholar-

like," which was a great claim on John's respect. He said he was "unaffectedly pious, without any stuff;" and that, too, was a great thing for John to say.

I was easy enough in my mind to feel pleasure in John's dining with us the second day; and a long chat with him in the evening refreshed me as much, or more, than a nap. We were very friendly and confidential. I gave him our statistics, which he seemed satisfied with; and he, in return, told me that he was getting on in business pretty well—not *too* well. I thought it implied he was glad not to have the whole, or part maintenance of three sisters on his hands.

"By the by, Isabella," cried he, after a pause, "what an unfortunate business that was of Jacintha's about Mr. Mortlake! All owing to this unlucky school."

"All owing to her own want of candour, I am afraid," said I.

“ Oh, that’s absurd,” said John. “ There was no occasion for her going about proclaiming herself a schoolmistress. I, for one, should not have put up with it. If the school had not existed, the dilemma could never have occurred.”

“ That is undeniable,” said I ; and I was ready to ask how we should have been supported without it, or how we could have foreseen Mr. Mortlake’s appearance on the stage, but I forbore.

“ Capital fellow, Mortlake,” pursued John, shifting his position in the easy-chair.

“ What is he like ?” said I, with assumed indifference.

“ Oh, he’s a fine figure of a man, as people say—tall, strongly built, but not too much so—dark, with dark hair and whiskers ; good eyes, good brow, nose slightly aquiline—age about thirty to thirty-five : not too old, you know, for Jacintha.”

“Dear me, no,” said I. “It was a great pity. But you have only spoken of his looks. What of his character? His temper is rather quick, I should be afraid.”

“Really I don’t think so ; and if it were, so is Jacintha’s.”

“Yes ; but two hot tempers don’t work well together. *One* side should be yielding.”

“Well, it may be so : but, at any rate, I don’t believe Mortlake has an uncomfortable temper, by any means. He is a very companionable, sensible, pleasant fellow.”

“Well principled ? ”

“Well, I can only say he’s a good deal stricter than I am,” said John, laughing lightly. “One of the men who always go to church on Sundays, at home or abroad, whether with a lady or not. Curious in his taste for good preaching, too—would rather

walk five miles to church, than hear a prosy sermon near home, when a good one was to be had."

"So would I, I'm sure, if I could," said I, sighing at the remembrance of Dr. Hook's Moral Essays, sleepily delivered, and Mr. Whipster's pert, epigrammatic effusions.

"Your Mr. Barnet, now, would suit him, I should fancy," said John. "Is not he a fine preacher?"

"I never heard him but once, when he preached for a local charity. I liked him very much. He is very much admired and beloved, I understand, in his own parish—the 'guide, philosopher, and friend' of rich and poor."

"Just so. He seems one of the few clergy whom I could wish for a friend. Mortlake should have been in the church. He says he's not good enough. At any rate, he's a very good man of business."

“He is a partner in a bank in Lombard Street, is not he?” said I.

“Yes: junior partner. Oh, he must be very well off. His family, too, decidedly respectable. Very well connected. Altogether, it was a vexatious business that the match did not come off. Jacintha will never have such another chance—probably never marry. Who is there here, you know? And she does not go anywhere else. It was a pity she refused coming to us this winter: she is now not so young as she was, and, though still a very fine woman, is growing older every year. Isabella, these are very capital coals of yours. How much are they the ton?”

CHAPTER IV.

Close to the window, sister dear,
Place now my easy-chair;—
How exquisite, to breathe again
The summer's balmy air!
How lovely are the trees and flowers,
Gay birds sing merrily,
And everywhere this world of ours
In gladness smiles on me!
“Father! I come,” my spirit said,
“I hear thy gracious voice,
And gladly will I make henceforth
Thy sacred ways my choice.
I now can bless the chastening rod
In mercy sent to me,
To make me live henceforth for God,
And for eternity.”

S. B., *The Invalid Restored.*

WHEN Mr. Barnet came to us next, it was to bring Mary to us, to stay as long as she could be of any use or comfort.

Dear Mary ! she had already matured wonderfully, both in person and mind ; her home-experience had made her womanly in self-possession and in action ; and constant intercourse with, and *reaching up to*, a well-stored, intellectual mind like her father's, had made her a most intelligent companion.

Marian was just in the state to benefit by her affectionate cares, and enjoy snatches of her conversation ; while Jacintha and I, who had so long been detached from the general affairs of the house, were truly thankful for a substitute on whom we could depend whenever we were drawn away by necessary demands on our time. Jacintha now resumed her place in the school-room, and summoned Fanny thither ; and the snow having at length given place to a thaw, and then to clear, frosty weather, she and the poor pent-up children were able to get fresh air and exercise, which was beneficial to her as well as to them.

In fact, Jacintha, who had borne incredible fatigues with unsparing self-devotion, while Marian was in danger, now felt it her duty to resign the chief charge of her to me, with my valuable assistant Mary Barnet. But Marian's state was still very critical: indeed, far more so than we had first supposed. Her delirium still recurred at night, and though it was of a harmless, rambling kind, yet Mr. Herne told me, as long as it lasted, there must still be a pressure on the brain. We expected, when once she had survived the crisis, to see her strength and appetite revive with the rapidity of a Russian spring, when the buds may almost be seen to burst, and the flowers spring up in a night. But this was far from being the case; her appetite was very capricious; sometimes it was craving, and she could hardly wait to have her food prepared; at other times, nothing could tempt her—not even Mrs.

Meade's exquisite jellies, delicate little fancy-loaves, or concentrated essences of meat. I must say that nothing could equal the sympathy of our friends and neighbours, except their bounty—they thought nothing too good for Marian. Mr. Meade sent her his choicest wine, Mrs. Meade sent her fancy-bread, butter, new-laid eggs, fruit, jellies—others sent game, poultry, even venison: there was no end to the ways in which kindness expressed itself. It was particularly gratifying to Jacintha, keenly alive to the reproach of our school having fallen off, as it showed how many friends and supporters we had left. Mrs. Forsyth, even, sent—*cards!*

We were as much disappointed in Marian's strength as her appetite. The least noise had an almost insupportable effect on her nerves: she could sit up very little, and when she did, she could very little bear being spoken to.

John frequently wrote, "How is it Marian does not get better?" and no one could tell him. "There must be something wrong," he added; but no one could say where it was.

There was a quietude about Mary Barnet that made her just the help we wanted. She would sit beside Marian without wanting to talk or fidget. Always at leisure to obey a look or a word, she never seemed anxiously on the watch for them, but serenely occupied with her own thoughts till the very moment she was wanted. And then her touch was so light, her tread was so light, her voice so soft! No unnaturally constrained softness, no stealthy cat-like movements, no rustle or bustle, but always so pleasant. I learnt to think her quite pretty, and should have been surprised and hurt to hear any one call her plain.

As Marian was able, little by little, to hear

more of her gentle voice, Mary would read to her occasionally, sometimes a few Bible verses or a hymn, sometimes only a few lines from a certain little note-book of hers, which she set great store by, it being enriched with chosen *morceaux* that particularly pleased her. Such, for instance, as—

“ ‘ Surely, this must be the chariot sent to fetch me ! ’ said a dying Christian of her disease. ‘ How easy it is ! ’ ”

Or this—

“ Showy minds are insincere ; strong ones, never.”

Or—

“ With faith in God, action is happiness.”

To which Marian, too weak to follow the subject in words, would say, “ ah ! ” or “ hem ! ” and muse a little till she closed her eyes, as if too tired to think. One day, she was so much pleased with these lines, by

Miss Robertson, of Teignmouth, that she asked for them a second time, and I begged Mary to copy them out for me :—

“ Welcome thy gentle scourge, thou precious Lord ;
Small are the cords thy love hath intertwined,
And light the stroke. I own the just award
Of stripes, when in thy temple thou dost find
Unmeet intruders, traffickers abhorred,
That grieve thy loving spirit’s gracious mind,
Making the holy place where thou shouldst reign
Alone, a den of earthliness again.

“ Thou wilt destroy this temple ; for within
A fretting leprosy is on the walls,
Nor can the plague-spot of indwelling sin
Be purified, until the fabric falls ;
And though, at times, to feel thy work begin
Dismays the sinking flesh, yet faith recalls
The blessed hope, that, as thy word is true,
Thou wilt return, and build it up anew.”

I will add one more little piece, not on account of its poetical merit, but because there is something in it which touched our hearts.

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Mary told us she copied it out of a magazine :—

“ Was it the Saviour’s voice ? Methought it woke
Amid a choir of angels ; and He spoke !—
He spoke to welcome one just come from earth,
Called him to triumph in his heavenly birth ;
But bade him now by memory’s power retrace
The way that led to heaven’s bright dwelling-place.
‘ O, thou art safe at last ; I loved thee so,
I *died* for thee !—I would not let thee go !
But tell me, now that thou art safe above,
Why didst thou ever doubt thy Saviour’s love ?
Why was one fear, one thought of anguish thine ?
Was not mine arm almighty and divine ?
Why didst thou,—heir of mansions in the skies,
Chosen ere long to spread thy wing and rise,—
Why didst thou listen to the worldling’s song,
And all but join the trifling, festive throng ?
Nay, tremble not—I do not chide thee now,
Ransomed and safe in my own heaven art thou ;
But hadst thou with yet firmer faith relied
On Him who lived for thee, for thee who died,
The spirit of adoption I had given,
Till thou hadst lived on earth the life of heaven :
I would have sheltered thee, and not a care
And not a sorrow need have grieved thee there !’

Who will apply the lesson? Who will give
All glory to the Lord, and with him live?
Now, even now, his offered love embrace,
And taste, on earth, the riches of his grace!"

Mary Barnet was with us about three weeks ; and when she returned to Meadowley, it was on the understanding that Marian, if well enough, should accompany me thither at Easter, to spend a week or fortnight.

This Meadowley, according to Mary, with its breezy commons dappled with pools, its thatched cottages with their rose-trees, apple-trees, and bee-hives, its prosperous farms, scattered country-seats, ivy-grown church, and parsonage mantled with jessamine, was the sweetest place—quite like one of Miss Mitford's charming villages ; and its farmers, farmers' wives, farmers' daughters, its ploughmen, cricketers, and poachers, were quite like Miss Mitford's characters. Mary, in her quiet,

pleasant way, described one after another of these worthies, touching and re-touching till she quite worked them up into little cabinet pictures. It charmed Marian, who would say from time to time, "Tell me some more of Tim Jellicoe's quaint sayings;" "Let me hear what became of Kitty Clover;" "How did Jem Brookes turn out, after all the pains your father took with him?" "What became of widow Green's little orphans?" "How did you manage for a schoolmistress?" "How came you to visit Betsy Neale?" and many similar inquiries, all of which Mary was delighted to answer.

And, while her sole aim was to show us how good a mother was one, how dutiful a daughter another, how patient a sufferer a third, how repentant a misdoer a fourth, I could not but make my private remarks that Mary herself seemed the friend, counsellor, and comforter of all. But she never intended to convey this

impression. She loved to dwell on her father's praises, and tell of all the good he did and the happiness he conferred, and what a delightful companion he was to her during the long winter evenings; and how, when he was not talking, she loved to hear the scratch of his pen while he wrote, or for each of them to enjoy their books, in companionable silence. If Mary had been very cunning in her endeavours to excite our wishes to judge of the attractions of Meadowley for ourselves, she could not have had better success.

We were very sorry to lose her, but we were half-way through Lent, and Easter would soon be at hand—quite soon enough for Marian, who had only been out twice for a very few minutes in Mrs. Meade's close carriage. Marian's grand object was to get to church, which she accomplished one week-day; but she became hysterical before the prayers were

ended, and I was obliged to lead her out. The girls had now resumed their practising, which Jacintha persuaded herself could not be heard up in Marian's room; but she was mistaken—it tried Marian's nerves greatly, and when I saw the tears course her pale cheeks, I longed all the more for Easter.

It came at last: Jacintha, generously forgetful of self, thought nothing of passing the short vacation in solitude—she should enjoy it, she said. She should practise her noisiest pieces without remorse, and enjoy quite a feast of light reading during the long evenings, and lie in bed as long as she liked every morning, and copy a great deal of music, and do a great many things she had been unable to find time for all the winter. Nor were we to hurry ourselves in returning from Meadowley after Easter if we were pressed to stay. She should get on admirably with the three girls, and was

quite able now to rejoice in the number of scholars being so limited, though she should be glad to get the school up again to the old number when Marian was quite well. Therefore Marian must make it her duty to do so as fast as she could, by eating and drinking, and being in the open air, and enjoying herself in every way as much as possible.

Kind Jacintha ! It was delightful to witness her sunny look as she stood in the doorway to see us drive off. Mr. Barnet had a nice four-wheeled chaise, but we thought it best to perform the ten miles' journey in a close carriage, the easiest we could find.

So we soberly drove out of the straggling town-end, and along the rectory wall and park-paling, and so into the open country, over undulating downs that now and then afforded glimpses of villages, and church towers and spires. We were both very easily excited to

cheerfulness by new scenery, and I had hardly caught sight of the yellow furze and purple mallows on the common, before my spirits began to rise.

“Look,” said I, “there are some gipsies in that dry water-course. What a singular people they are! and what an eye for the picturesque they always have! Do you remember our uncle Middlemass’s old house in Surrey, on the banks of the Mole? That river is remarkable for swelling or running shallow with very little apparent cause. I remember, one Sunday, we were all crossing the rustic wooden bridge on our way to church, when we observed a party of gipsies pitching their tent in the very bed of the river, which was perfectly dry, and looked very romantic between its precipitous, gravelly banks, clothed with tangled bushes. On our return from church, the river was brawling along its course—the gipsies, of course, had decamped.”

“I wonder they were not clever enough to foresee what would happen,” said Marian.

“Probably they would have been, with regard to any less unaccountable river. There was a very sharp, awkward turn of the high road just at the foot of that bridge. One night, when I was staying with my aunt and uncle, we were alarmed by a loud barking of the watch-dog, and on opening a window, heard distant cries of ‘help ! help !’ proceeding from the verge of the pleasure-grounds. We thought somebody was being robbed or murdered—the night was very dark : my aunt did not like my uncle going to the rescue, but he was resolved on it, and sallied forth—

‘Close buttoned to the chin,
Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within ;’

attended by his man Thomas with a lanthorn. I don’t think he armed himself with any more formidable weapon than an umbrella. The

evening was quite warm, though dark, and my aunt and I, impelled by fear for my uncle and curiosity, put our shawls over our heads, and stole after him. As we drew nearer the bridge the cries of 'help! help!' grew louder, prompted, probably, by the hope of assistance afforded by the glimmer of Thomas's lanthorn. On reaching the brink of the Mole, the mystery was explained:—a gentleman's coachman, unacquainted with the neighbourhood, was driving home his master's empty carriage from a dinner party, and missing the turning, had driven unawares into the bed of the river. Hearing the water splash, and not knowing how shallow it was, he thought it best to pull up and shout for assistance."

"Discretion was the better part of valour there," said Marian. "There ought to have been a beautiful young lady in the carriage, to be rescued by a younger hero than uncle Middlemass."

“The neighbourhood was not without its romance,” said I. “One night, the post-boy, trotting along with his letter-bags, was shot at from behind the hedge: it was never known by whom, though Captain Bolton heard the report in his grounds, and the boy galloped up to the lodge as white as death, and ready to drop from his horse.”

“Do you think it might have been some poacher, who had a spite against Captain Bolton, and meant to shoot *him*?”

“Then why shoot the post-boy?” said I, sapiently. “What a pretty heath this is, Marian! It reminds me of Bewick’s vignette of a wild common, with a post-chaise driving furiously along its verge, and a gibbet in the distance.”

“Enough to make the post-chaise drive furiously, I think!” said Marian.

“Perhaps so; but, my dear Marian, travelling was vastly different in the last generation

to what it is now. Think of our great-aunt and uncle Hugh being attacked by highway-men on Shooter's Hill, within sight of a turnpike!"

"How was that?" inquired Marian.

"Aunt Hugh," said I, "had a scapegrace brother, who ran away to sea, and went to Sierra Leone. There was a strange mortality on board the ship on its homeward voyage, and, when it reached Portsmouth, the mate wrote a few lines to my aunt, to say that if she wished to see her brother alive, she must lose no time in going to Portsmouth. So she and my uncle started at once, in a post-chaise, and just as they were slowly creeping up Shooter's Hill—in full sight of the turnpike—my uncle enjoying a nap—'Your money or your life!' cries a hoarse voice, at the same moment that a pistol was fired through the window. My uncle, sputtering and choking with the smoke, and wounded all over the face with the gunpowder (of which he bore

the unseemly marks to his grave), gave up his watch and purse, but my aunt had secreted hers, and no threats could induce her to surrender them. Another post-chaise appearing in the distance, the highwaymen, with an oath, galloped off, leaving my aunt half dead with fear, and my uncle's face streaming with blood and grievously smarting. The highwayman's pistol had been loaded with ball, but the ball had dropped out, owing to his holding the weapon slanting, doubtless to avoid wounding his comrade at the other window. It was found afterwards at the bottom of the chaise, and preserved by my aunt as a relic. When they reached the turnpike-gate the turnpike-man pretended to have seen and heard nothing of the occurrence, but my uncle was convinced he connived at it."

"So that was the way uncle Hugh got his purple face!" cried Marian. "Did my aunt find her brother alive?"

“ Really, that is a particular I never thought of inquiring,” said I.

Just then a horseman, rather quaintly apparelled and mounted, passed us at an easy canter, and gaining a little hillock between high banks of sand, seemed on the look-out for something or some one.

“ How very exciting !” said Marian, laughing. “ Surely, Isabella, we are about to fall into an ambuscade !”

In fact, we had fallen in with Astley’s equestrian troupe on one of its country progresses ; and a curious procession it made. First, the scout aforesaid. Then a couple of riders, giving themselves the airs of a brace of lancers. Then the clown, on a piebald horse. Then a mixed multitude of riders, all as silent as if they were pictures. Then a caravan full of women, children, and properties, with one or two gay banners and streamers. To the

back of this van, two or three diminutive ponies were attached, that, doubtless, played very important parts in the circle. Their attractions seemed enhanced by paint: at least, I never saw such variegated horse-hides without it. Slowly behind came a waggon drawn by eight horses, and packed with the heavy lumber. Lastly, another solitary rider. The whole *cortège* had a burlesque and romantic state.

We passed one another three times:—first, they passed us, ascending the hill; secondly, we passed them as they were baiting at a little wayside hostelry at the hill foot; lastly, they passed us again, one of them winding a mellifluous charge on the bugle—not

“That wild horn
On Fontarabian echoes borne,”

that was heard sixty miles off. This was a keyed bugle.

CHAPTER V.

See the wretch that long has tost,
On the thorny bed of pain,
Again repair his vigour lost,
And walk and run again.
The meanest flow'ret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise !

GRAY.

MARIAN looked around her with delight. “How sweet and fresh the air is over this heath !” said she. “Why should Goldsmith have called the furze blossom ‘unprofitably gay ?’ It is sweet to the eye, sweet to the smell—like burnt cocoa-nut shell, I think !—and, if it gratifies two senses, we need not call it unprofitable.”

“He was not much of a utilitarian, neither,” said I. “One would have fancied him fonder of vagrant blooms than of a potatoe patch.”

“He wanted to tag a rhyme, that was all,” said Marian. “Gay rhymes with way, and so he said the furze was unprofitably gay.”

“You know all about it, I dare say, as you write verses sometimes,” said I, slyly.

“I?” said Marian, colouring a little. “Oh, a little hymn or two, that’s all. No, not quite all,” added she, truthfully, after ruminating a little; “but it’s no matter of any one’s but mine, I think.”

“Oh, it’s a feather in your cap, *I* think,” said I.

“I know you don’t, seriously,” said Marian; “or, if you do—See, there are primroses in the cleft of that warm bank! and germander speedwell! That looks like spring, does not it?”

“Spring is fairly here now,” said I, “though

rather backward. The horse-chestnut buds are beginning to open in Dr. Hook's shrubbery. In ten days the swallows will return."

"From whence?" said Marian. "Ah, that's what nobody knows! I wonder whether Mr. Barnet has 'Knapp's Journal of a Naturalist.' If not, I could lend it to him, you know. He would be sure to like it."

I enjoyed hearing her talk in this desultory way, but did not encourage sustained conversation, as I feared her expending all her strength before she reached the journey's end. She became very weary towards its close, leant her head against the back of the carriage, and closed her eyes. At length, when I quietly said, "There's the windmill," she started and roused herself, saying, "Is there? then we must be close on Meadowley. Mary said the windmill was only a little way from the village."

And soon we were traversing the straggling village street, and passing the quaint old church and neat school-houses. In another minute, we were at the little green gate of the pretty parsonage, with its diamond-bright lattices gleaming amid the old walls of time-stained red brick, woven over with the intricate network of branches as yet only budding, that would soon be bursting into leaves and flowers. A large white cat was sunning itself on a window-ledge, and a little white lap-dog, already familiar to us by the name of Shock, set up a shrill bark at the open door, but was unceremoniously silenced by Mr. Barnet, who removed him by the nape of the neck into some unseen place of durance; while Mary, all smiles, came out to the gate to welcome us, and supported Marian up the little slope with her arm round her waist.

Mr. Barnet, after a few words of cordial

welcome, kindly left us to ourselves, and Marian was glad to avail herself of our recommendation to lie down at once on her white-curtained bed in the quaint pretty room which Mary assured us she had occupied for some nights, that we might be under no apprehension of damp. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate; everything was orderly, fresh, and well-appointed, and I saw at once that Mary knew how to regulate a well-ordered house.

When I had accomplished our little unpacking, and smoothly placed our things in the empty drawers and wardrobe, I sat down by the bedroom fire with Mary, and chatted with her, Marian listening to all, though with closed eyes. Afterwards, Mary begged me to excuse her for a few minutes; adding that her father was gone out, so that I need not hurry down. I was glad to be left in quiet a little, especially as I soon observed that Marian was asleep. I

rested myself in the comfortable chintz-covered easy-chair, and gazed on the history of Joseph portrayed on the Dutch tiles of the fire-place, and the Chinese tumblers on the chimney-piece, and the engraving of the trial of John Huss over the mantel-shelf, till I believe I dozed too.

At length a very clerical-toned, deep-sounding clock slowly struck, and warned Marian and me that we were within half an hour of dinner. So then she sat up, and I smoothed her hair, and helped her to dress, and put a few finishing touches to my own toilette, and then we went down together.

It was such a pretty, quaint little place!—and, as Marian said, “full of surprises.” Your ideas of the ground plan of the house continually proved erroneous: there were steps up and steps down; odd turnings and corners, all converted into useful places for neat or orna-

mental purposes. Even awkward beams and posts, ugly ledges or queer nooks, by being coaxed and applied to something for which they never were originally intended, yielded obedience to the hand of taste. The umbrella-corner, the garden-bonnet closet, the dried-seed shelf, the string-bag, the newspaper-box, all confessed that "order is heaven's first law." As for Mary's store-closet, and clothes-presses, her kitchen, dairy, and safe,—the fairy Order would certainly have found no exercise for her wand in them.

Mary had nice servants, too : steady, middle-aged women, that had been trained by her mother ; and a quick, well-spoken, quiet, young man-servant. Her father's study was not as tidy as she would have liked it, but as tidy as she could make it—truth to say, it was littered with books and papers ; but yet it looked comfortable withal. The little drawing-room had

a very pretty view of the church, and was well and tastefully furnished; the dining-room was less cheerful, but very snug.

And now we were joined by Mr. Barnet, fresh from his toilette, in as much company-trim as he ever affected, and looking quite the clergyman, though without any clerical foppery, which is, I think, the worst foppery of all. After a few minutes' chat, dinner was announced: he gave me his arm, while Mary passed hers round Marian. It was quite a pleasure to see Mary do the honours of the table: so self-possessed and attentive without being obtrusive; and carving so neatly and quickly, without being obliged to pause in conversation. Then, the potatoes were their own growth, the poultry their own rearing, the bread their own making, the beer their own brewing, and all excellent of their kind. The sea-kale and rhubarb, indeed, were the gift of

an affluent neighbour who had forcing-houses. But Mr. Barnet farmed his own glebe and grew his own corn.

“Papa,” said Mary, “John tells me we have nearly finished the golden-balls, and must soon begin on the early-showers. You will be glad but I shall be sorry, for I like waxy potatoes.”

“We ought not to be out of golden-balls yet,” said Mr. Barnet. “Besides, I must save some for planting, and I promised a few to William Coates, so I am afraid you will soon be reduced to floury potatoes.”

“What pretty names potatoes have,” said Marian. “Pretty enough for flowers.”

“Oh, they have other pretty names besides golden-balls and early-showers,” said Mr. Barnet; and he ran over the names of several.

“I have brought home quite a *new* newspaper to-day,” said he, presently. “Only two

days old! I seldom get one younger than four. But by getting them regularly, you know, I fare as well as my neighbours. It rather throws me out, when I have a paper thus early—to-morrow my paper will seem stale, that would otherwise have contented me!”

“Cannot you put this away, then, till the day after to-morrow?” suggested I.

“No, Miss Middlemass, no! I am not philosophical enough for, that—especially as there is Indian news in it. Do you care for Indian news?”

“Not much,” said I.

“Ah, if you had a brother in India, it would make all the difference. Not that the news this paper contains is likely to concern him. But it is about a country he inhabits, a people familiar to him. Mary, Mr. Thompson gave me a new book (a new *old* book, that is)

for our lending library—‘The Life of Lord Clive.’ ”

“Who do you think will read it, papa?” said Mary. “I don’t believe our people are up to it.”

“Well, I have my doubts myself—and yet Clive’s history is brilliant and romantic: the worst is, the writer has not let facts speak for themselves, but has given them a twist—and I’m afraid a wrong ‘twist. No; I *hope* it’s a wrong twist, because I should not like it to be right.”

“Why so?”

“He makes a hero of him. Now, Clive (between ourselves) is not one of my heroes at all. A passionate schoolboy, an intractable youth, his *genius* was great, I grant you, and his defence of Arcot was one of the most splendid things of its kind ever achieved. At five-and-twenty, you know, with a hundred and

twenty Europeans and two hundred Sepoys, he successfully held a ruinous, ill-fortified post fifty days against ten thousand men. That was a great thing. When he commenced offensive operations, he was equally successful. He returned to England in the flush of his young glory, to wear his well-earned laurels. And then he returned to India, to acquire new fame, amass enormous wealth—and commit enormous crimes.”

“ Could not you give us a lecture about him in the school-room, papa ? ” said Mary.

“ Well, Polly, if I do, you must abridge the details for me.”

“ Oh, yes ! ”

“ And I’ll undertake the moralizing. Yes ; I think I might draw a useful lesson from his treacherous conduct to Omichund. It was enough to make our name abhorred throughout the land. But, at the time, new victories

led to new honours ; and then he returned to display his spoils, and reap his reward at home."

" A bitter reward it was," said I.

" Who ever displayed his spoils and vaunted his successes," said Mr. Barnet, " without provoking envy, hatred, or malice? His life was like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt. He frequently attempted self-destruction, and, finally, died by his own hand, at the age of forty-nine. He was the Moloch as Hastings was the Mammon of our Indian history. Have you read Clive's Life, Miss Middlemass?"

" Yes," said I. " It is superb ; but I felt as fatigued after reading it as if I had been spending a long day in an oriental palace, filled only with embroidered shawls, elephants' tusks, and gold muslins."

" I am afraid, papa," said Mary, " that you

have been reading on horseback again. White-star will get his foot into a rabbit-hole or stumble over a mole-hill, some of these days, and I shall not feel very much obliged to the 'little gentleman in black velvet.'"

"Well," said he, laughing, "I did yield to the temptation, I own—the downs were so lonely."

"And you know them so well, I suppose," said I, "that they have lost their charm."

"I can hardly say that," said Mr. Barnet. "They are favourable to an objective, though still more to a subjective train of thought—(to use two cant words of the day). Are you a disciple of *Cant*, Miss Marian? or are you an admirer of poetry? I can see you are! Your favourite poet? 'So many!' Oh, but surely there must be one pre-eminent. Wordsworth? Ay, he is mine, next to Shakspeare and Milton. And I dare say you remember

his description of the train of thoughts suggested to him by a heap of stones near Esthwaite, piled by a man sick of the world, who would sit there for hours, visited only by straggling sheep, or perhaps a stone-chat or sandpiper?"

"No," said Marian. "It is in the 'Excursion,' I suppose. I like his shorter pieces best."

"Perhaps I do too; but the 'Excursion' is very fine. That description of his, for instance, to which I have just referred, always comes to my mind when I pass a certain pile of stones on our downs. The man, he says, gazed on the beautiful scene before him with a heart so lorn and cheerless from too constant introspection, that its charms only led to tears. And then Wordsworth finely adds—

'The man, whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one
The least of Nature's works!'"

“ I am trying to acquire a taste for Wordsworth,” said Mary to me, smiling, “ because papa is so fond of him.”

It was just like her. I could see she was endeavouring to assimilate her tastes to his in everything, and yet she frankly declared her own where they differed, and argued and joked with him quite fearlessly.

We spent the evening very quietly. Mr. Barnet was called away to baptize a newly-born child, and we enjoyed a feminine gossip, and then Marian went to bed early. Mary made tea afresh, in a diminutive tea-pot that held just enough for one, when her father returned; and then, after a nice chat, we had family prayers, and retired to rest. Marian was not delirious that night: the chain was broken.

She took the whole of the next day to recover from her journey; the greater part of it

in bed. As it was a rainy morning, her loss was less ; and she would not let me sit much with her, so that I had much conversation, that really deserved the name, with Mary, who had many serious affairs to consult me about. She said she had no companion of her own age in the neighbourhood ; and no older female friend to apply to in any emergency, except Mrs. Webb, of Oakfield ; and Mrs. Webb was often from home.

It seemed a solitary life for this young girl to lead ! But she certainly did not find it dull : only, she said, she sometimes felt the want of an experienced female friend to advise her in things that were out of her father's province.

Afterwards, when I was sitting with Marian, she came up and said the weather had brightened, and her father was wanting to show me his schools : if I would go with him, she would take care of Marian the while. So I equipped my-

self, and started with Mr. Barnet—he, keeping a little in advance, which was a way of his, I think he was hardly conscious of. People who lead secluded lives, often fall into these little eccentricities.

Everything looked fresh and sparkling with the recent raindrops now glittering in the sun. There was much to interest in the village and in the schools, where the girls, who underwent a close examination, seemed very well taught by a rather superior young woman of about seven-and-twenty. The boys, likewise, seemed fortunate in their teacher, a young Scotchman, who appeared both shrewd and kind.

After this, Mr. Barnet beguiled me into accompanying him to visit one or two cottages; and when we left them, he consulted me about certain improvements he meditated. Then I found he had the key of the church in his pocket, and would be disappointed if I did not

let him show me the interior of the church, which had a curious fresco on one of the walls, lately discovered under the whitewash, and restored. He showed me some fine oak carving, which had also been embedded in plaster till he and Mary had set to work to pick it out with their penknives. It had occupied many a long hour, and might occupy many more. In this way, we made out our time till within half an hour of dinner. But I must not omit to mention the warm manner in which he expressed his thanks to me and my sisters, for having helped to make Mary what she was—the ornament of her home, and the comfort of his life.

On our return, we found Mary had dressed Marian, and brought her down into the drawing-room, where she was lying on the couch near the fire, looking very pale but very contented. Mary would not have her join us at

dinner, but insisted on sending her dinner in to her, as she was sure the fatigue of sitting up to table had been too much for her the previous day.

Marian was not yet well enough to bear music, therefore Mary, at a hint from me, forbore to play. Instead of that, our evening recreation was supplied by Mr. Barnet, who read aloud a clever magazine tale with great spirit. It was just one of those little things that amuse the passing hour, and are never thought of afterwards.

I am sorry to say, Marian's delirium returned at night, though not painfully or for long. The next day, she went round the garden and along the church-path in a wheel-chair that had been used by Mary's mother. Every day she did a little more; and every day we had the cheering hope that a little ground had been gained: but yet she looked

so delicate that there seemed but too much reason to fear that this trying illness of hers might terminate in a decline. I could see Mr. Barnet thought so: I saw, or fancied I could see him tracing his wife's early symptoms in Marian: there was such a look of concern, amounting almost to care, on his brow, when he looked at her! Sometimes, I thought it was because she occupied his wife's couch, and his wife's chair.

He endeavoured to enliven her by harmless pleasantries, and succeeded: but, at times, spoke to her, and in her presence, with a seriousness peculiarly suitable to a person whose illness appeared unlikely to end in recovery, yet with nothing gloomy or dispiriting in what he said. It was of inestimable benefit to Marian. He said just the things that I should have liked to say, but could not: and they came with more authority from him. She took

them so nicely ! not contenting herself with merely assenting, but brooding over them afterwards and converting them into real spiritual aliment. One morning, when I awoke, I found her with her eyes wide open, and a look of such sedate satisfaction on her face that I could not help asking her what she was thinking about. She said—

“I was thinking how wonderful it seemed to have been privileged to have anything to do with the education of Mary Barnet. She was with us six months only ; and yet she attributes to those six months more substantive good than in previous years. This is owing to *you*, Isabella, and to Jacintha ; though she insists on attributing some of her good influences to me.”

I said, “Example teaches. I had very little to do with her in comparison with you and Jacintha. We all did our best ; and the soil

was so well prepared that whatever good seed was cast into it took root and brought forth abundantly."

"It seems so strange," pursued Marian, still musing, "when I was eighteen and she seventeen, there seemed a little difference between us; but now that her birthday has passed and mine has not come, we are both eighteen together!"

"And she looks it," said I. "Mary has become very womanly, and is quite competent to take charge of a house of her own—though I don't see much present chance of her having one."

"Why cannot you be content with things as they are?" said Marian. "*She* is; and has every reason to be so, I think!"

So I was silenced.

CHAPTER VI.

Next to mine own beloved so long,
I have not spent my heart in vain ;
I watched the blade, I see the grain,—
A woman's soul, most soft, yet strong.

KINGSLEY.

INSTEAD of returning home at the end of ten days, we remained three weeks. I would gladly have then left Marian behind me, for she was still very weak; and her delirium, I am sorry to say, still continued—not every night, but most nights; and I knew while this was the case, she ought not to return to the scene of duty.

Still, she was not conscious of the symptom herself, and, believing herself better than she was, she longed to relieve Jacintha of part of

her cares: But Jacintha told her plainly that she would not allow her to do so, even if she came home; and reminded her of what was really the case, that the charge of the five girls who were now our only pupils was not more arduous than that of many a private governess; and that, if we did not get the school up to something like its former number, there would be no need to keep Miss Dixon.

Marian and I, therefore, stayed a second and third week; and during this period she was able to receive the sacrament, and to attend two or three short week-day services. But on Sunday, when the organ played, she could not bear it; and the unsuccessful experiment made her very unwell all the afternoon, and delirious at night. We were obliged to go on *pian'-piano*. Meanwhile she made progress, and lost her anxious look, and liked Mr. Barnet's conversations, and readings, and

church ministrations: she often said, "It is a *privilege* to be here—oh, what shall we do when we return to Dr. Hook?" As for myself, being able to get about more than I had done for some years, and being supposed to be more locomotive than I really was, I had a pride and pleasure in keeping up to the mark as much as I could; and astonished myself as much as Marian by what I achieved. She said, smiling, she wished Mr. Barnet could make her walk as well as he made me.

Sometimes, in the evening, we had long, confidential talks with him and Mary about our school affairs. We told them, unreservedly, of the false step that had been taken with Emma Grove; of the trouble we had had about Margaret Forest, and the injury that had ensued from the enmity of Mrs. Callender, which, Mr. Herne had told us, spread far and wide. I asked Mr. Barnet what he thought

we could or should do to counteract her evil reports. He thought that it would have been better, in the first instance, to write a plain statement of facts to the parents of each girl; but that now, as a little time had passed, the evil would probably blow over, and we should live it down and refute calumny by our own judicious conduct and the restored popularity of the school. I thought he gave us a great deal of valuable advice by taking for granted we were going to do many things that were, in fact, his suggestions. We ended by agreeing that if the scandals continued and spread, they must be stopped; but that it would be wisest to act with deliberation, and, if possible, not stir in the matter at all.

What pleased me very much was the way in which Mr. Barnet spoke of Jacintha. This must have been owing to Mary, for he had seen very little of her himself; but he seemed

to have an intuitive perception of the nobler features of her character, and to sympathize with her in the pain she must feel at having hastily condemned an innocent person. He said he was sure she would recover the school; and spoke so encouragingly of it, that though he knew no more of the future than I did, I felt hopeful myself.

All that impressed and encouraged me, took yet greater effect on Marian's impressible mind; so that it came to pass she steadfastly resolved to return home at the three weeks' end, animated with vivid hopes of what she *could*, and with strong resolutions what she *would* do.

So we took leave of our kind friends one sunny morning in April, when the bees were humming over the blossoms, and the barley and beans were beginning to peer above ground, and the hawthorn-hedges wore a pale,

thin mantle of green. The rooks clamouring in the tall trees, and the lark loudly singing over our heads, added to the cheerfulness of the rural scene we were leaving, and the last glimpse we had of the father and daughter standing at their green gate, was one to dwell on with pleasure.

Jacintha was very glad to have us back once more, though she said she wished we had remained longer at Meadowley; and she saw so much improvement in Marian that both Marian and I were elated by it. We talked a great deal of our pleasant visit, and Marian was quite cheerful and playful; and spoke sanguinely of being soon able to do as much as ever. Alas, she was more than usually delirious that night!

In short, this symptom continued, though in all other respects, she was better; and, on my mentioning it to Mr. Herne, he looked

very grave, and said it was plain she was unfit for any mental drudgery at present, and required more entire change and repose than she had yet been able to enjoy: he thought I had better take her away for several weeks, not to a friend's house, but where we should be quite by ourselves, and yet have novelty without excitement.

Jacintha was called in to our council, and, on hearing what Mr. Herne said, was eager that his wishes should be adopted, declaring herself quite able to spare us both. I knew we could ill afford it, but what could we do? Miss Linnet's lodgings were cheap; we could live there on as little as anywhere: I asked Mr. Herne whether Fishport would be a suitable place: he said Yes; he knew of none better.

So Marian was summoned from the school-room, where, against advice, she *would* steal in;

and Mr. Herne, after a few professional inquiries, told her as gently as possible, that she neither was almost well nor likely to be so, while she remained at home, and, that for the sake of her affectionate family, it was her duty to go to the sea-side.

Poor Marian flushed, and her eyes filled with tears, which presently overflowed; but Mr. Herne was a man accustomed to carry his point; and, before he left us, it was a settled thing that I should write by the next post to Miss Linnet, to inquire if we could have her lodgings.

During the two days that elapsed before I could receive her answer, Marian was much dispirited; but when the letter came, it made her laugh, and after that, she looked forward to the journey cheerfully. Thus wrote Miss Linnet:—

“12, *Sea View, Fishport,*

“*Thursday Afternoon.*

“MADAM,

“Your favour of yesterday duly to hand. It gave my sister and self genuine concern to learn that your amiable and attractive sister should be seriously out of health, in consequence of the insidious inroads of that recent scourge of our isle, influenza. Doubtless the marine breezes will restore to her cheeks their pristine bloom; for youth, my dear madam, soon and effectually repairs the ravages of disease. I dare say you are familiar with Savage’s ‘Ode on the Recovery of a Lady of Quality from the Smallpox’—death aimed the blow, but was foiled. I am happy to state that our modest tenement is at present unoccupied, and quite at your service. It is a pleasing reflection, though recently a bitter one, that the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon declined enjoying our apartments this season, for the

(scarcely reasonable?) reason that we charged too much for her bedroom fire (*6d. per diem*—considering she had the kitchen fire gratis, not dear, I think?) Surely this ignoble closeness too plainly reveals (what indeed, is the case) that her nobility is that of connection, not of descent. I am, madam, with my sister's best duty,

“Yours respectfully,

“ (for sister and self),

“KEZIA LINNET.

“Compliments to Miss Marian pre-supposed. A line will oblige, stating when to expect you.”

I remember, that when Marian was selecting what to have packed up for this expedition, she put away a very pretty coloured muslin, and took out one that had faded and washed out, saying it would do very well for a place where no one would see us. A very ordinary shawl

and a garden-hat were packed on the same principle, though I told her she was paying me a very poor compliment. But she said so much in defence of the usefulness of the old hat and shawl on the shingle, that I could not reply to it.

We took leave of Jacintha with regret, for we were leaving her to work for us all; but she made quite light of it, and said she would cheerfully undertake thrice the toil, if she could but re-establish the reputation of the school; and that as for Marian's share of the business, the best course she could pursue would be that which would soonest make her quite well.

Our little journey was accomplished quite safely; and our arrival at 12, Sea View, was hailed with joy by the Misses Linnet, whose kind eyes shone with tears when they saw how much Marian was wasted by her illness. They

made a thousand little excuses to hover about us ; and it was evident that no small pains had been bestowed in preparing for us. After Marian had seated herself in an easy-chair at the open window to enjoy the fresh sea-air, Miss Linnet came with an extra cushion, which she said she was sure would make her more comfortable, and then lingered for yet a little more chat, while I made tea.

“Is Fishport full?” said Marian, with a pretty accurate knowledge of its general emptiness.

“There are *some* vacant houses, certainly,” said Miss Linnet with a little cough ; “No. 4 and No. 5—but it is thought the drains are defective. No. 6 is under repair. Nos. 7, 8, and 9, as you are aware, are occupied by resident families. Mrs. Tweedy, of No. 10, is absent—she has *not* let her house—not that I am aware of her having tried. No. 11 is

likewise unoccupied at present, except by servants."

"But you have not accounted for Nos. 1, 2, and 3."

"Oh, surely not. No. 1 is again in the occupation of the Mullion family. Mrs. Mullion is still, sad to say, very delicate in the chest; this fine air will doubtless restore her—in time. At No. 2 are the De Wrights—at least, so I understand the name—at first, I took it simply for Wright, but I am told there is a *de* before it. No. 3, you are aware, is a boarding-house: it does not answer, nor can it ever be expected to answer, or its proprietress, Mrs. Underton, would hardly have received her only two present boarders, I think—for nobody else will be very likely to intrude on her circle, if report speak truly of them."

"And what does report say?" inquired Marian.

“That they are a madman and his keeper,” said Miss Linnet, with another little cough.

“Dear me, how unpleasant!” said I. “I hope we shall see nothing of them!”

“How should we?” said Marian. “Surely nine doors’ distance is far enough off.”

“There they are now!” cried Miss Linnet, excitedly: “just at the point of the cliff. They will have turned the corner in another minute.”

Marian and I looked after them, but could only see a couple of long-legged figures, whose length of limb was ludicrously prolonged by the reflection in the wet sand.

“And there’s Mrs. De Wright!” cried Miss Linnet, “with her pink parasol. Pretty little woman! *She* need not mind leaving her footprint on the sand, for it is the smallest I ever saw—as small as *yours*, Miss Marian. Oh, Miss Marian, what a *sweet* book you gave my

sister! I assure you it has been our select reading on Sabbath evenings ever since. There are thoughts in it that—There goes *Mr. De Wright*. That gentleman with whom he is shaking hands is our new curate, the Reverend Eugenius Carp. *Mr. De Wright* is evidently on the look-out for his wife, but is looking the wrong way. If he does not turn his head in a moment, she will be behind the point. He *has* turned his head! What a near thing!”

The next morning Miss Linnet came in with a little laugh, which, in any other person I should have thought rather affected. “Oh, my dear ma’am, my dear Miss Marian,” began she, flirting out her hands, “such a blunder! such a ridiculous mistake! I *thought* I was quite sure, but to make quite secure, I said to the postman this morning, ‘The family at No. 2 are the De Wrights!’ ‘Yes,’ says he,

‘the Wrights, Mr. and Mrs. Dannel Wright.’
‘Daniel!’ exclaimed I, ‘why, now, *didn’t* you tell me there was a *de* before their name?’
‘A D.? certainly!’ says he: ‘D. stands for Dannel, all the world over!’ So there, I have been telling you they were the De Wrights! What an old goose you must think me!”
Then, with an instantaneous change of her tone into one of deep gravity, “What will it please you, madam, that I shall provide for your dinner?”

In the course of a few days I marked with joy a decided improvement in Marian. Her delirium gradually ceased, her appetite improved, her strength increased, and her colour returned. Little by little, it is true, but still she made steady progress. Bathing always agreed with her, and it now seemed to reinvigorate her day by day. Round the point, which has already been mentioned, was a semi-

circular sweep made by the cliffs, where the bathing-machines occupied the foreground, while a nice bed of dry shingle, under the rocks, afforded me a pleasant resting-place, while Marian took her bath, rather earlier than other people were accustomed to do.

A very odd incident occurred here one day, which I must now relate. I was sitting nearer to the sea than usual, with a considerable space between me and the rocks, so as to leave plenty of room for people to pass unnoticed, though I had not observed a creature astir on the sands. I was crocheting very industriously; and Marian, who had taken her bath, was seated beside me, deep in "Tremaine," with her long hair hanging down to dry, when, on accidentally moving, she suddenly cried out on finding it weighted behind. A large and very fine crab was clinging with apparent pertinacity to the end of her tresses! But the

crab had been boiled, and was ingeniously attached to its moorings by a piece of pack-thread!

“What impertinence! What audacity!” cried I, in indignation. “Who can have done it?”

“The madman, I should think,” said Marian, laughing. “Gently, Isabella! you are pulling my hair unmercifully—use your scissors.”

I did so, and down fell the crab. I looked right and left for the perpetrator of the outrage, but not a soul could I see.

“Shameful! abominable!” said I. “This place wants a policeman—it is no longer a spot where unprotected females may roam about unmolested.”

“Nay, we were not even roaming,” said Marian, merrily, “but sitting quite still. What shall we do with the crab? it is a very fine one—shall we carry it home?”

“Certainly not!” said I, with decision. “If

it were holiday time, one might expect anything from schoolboys; but among a set of grown people, it is an unpardonable freedom!"

"I never knew you so wrathful, Isabella!" said Marian, who seemed to enjoy the joke in proportion to my discomfiture. "When your turn comes, perhaps it will be a lobster."

"My turn will *never* come, for it *shall* not," said I, rising with difficulty from my lowly seat: "let us go home—there is no comfort for us here, now our privacy has been invaded. We don't know who may be spying at us, or over-hearing us at this moment. Horrible!"

"As to overhearing us," said Marian, surveying the wide area all around, "I don't see how that is possible, unless the eaves-dropper is a fairy; and as for spying at us, some one *may* be *perdu* among the rocks, certainly; but if he is taking anything but a bird's-eye view of us it must be through a telescope."

“And there is hardly a man here who has not one tucked under his arm!” cried I. “Come along.”

“Stay, you are entangling your cotton—and you have dropped your parasol. Where is my book? Dear me, I was in the midst of such a pretty dialogue between Georgiana and her father. Now, then, Isabella, let us throw a sufficient portion of severity into our countenances as we walk along, for the benefit of the unknown offender! What a pity no poor fisherman, or woman, or boy, is near, that we might tell them where to find a nice crab! But not a creature is within sight—or within earshot.”

It appeared so; and yet, just as we were passing the nearest of the rickety old bathing-machines, it did seem to me that I heard a hollow voice murmur—

“Jack!—she won’t have the crab!”

CHAPTER VII.

Now 'tis high water ; and, with hundreds more,
He goes to catch the sea-breeze on the shore,
Or pace the crowded terrace, where one sees
Fashion and folly, beauty and disease :
The alderman, wheeled out in gouty chair ;
The lovesick girl, sent down for change of air ;
The sickly child, to bathe his crippled knee ;
The hopeless hectic, come to try the sea.

JANE TAYLOR: *Essays in Rhyme.*

“MY dear Marian,” said I, as we
walked towards our lodgings, “you
really must give up wearing that old hat and
shawl—they are quite plebeian ; and anybody
viewing you behind, sitting on the shingle
and buried under your strange habiliments,
might very naturally mistake your position
in life, and—and—”

“Tie a crab on to my back hair!” said Marian. “Well, I don’t think *any* body, at least everybody, would. There is no knowing what a madman might do. But, do you know, I very much doubt the accuracy of Miss Linnet’s report about him.”

“Why?”

“Why? Oh, because I’ve seen him once or twice at a distance, and he has not been demeaning himself in that way at all: and because it is not the only matter concerning which she has been misinformed. Think of the De Wrights. However, if you think that for general, rather than particular reasons, my personal appearance might be and ought to be improved, there is such a pretty little white silk bonnet, Isabella, in Madame Ecu’s *dépôt Parisienne*—only two pounds two!”

“Marian!”

“Well, would it not be a nice substitute for this old brown hat?”

“Where is the money to come from?”

“Oh, I can soon get that from the editor of the *Farnsbury Miscellany*, by sending him a tale called, ‘What do you think of it?’ I have it all in my head—it only wants writing down.”

“Then it may continue to want it, my dear Marian, for no bonnet shall be bought at the price of another brain fever!”

“But I am much more likely to relieve my brain by clearing it of the story than by keeping it pent up. You don’t understand us authoresses—us women of genius!” said she, laughing.

“Perhaps I don’t, but I hope I understand enough of what is right and fitting in such a case as this. So you must content yourself with some cheaper substitute for the brown hat, or continue to wear it.”

“Well, Isabella, I have had my harmless

little joke, and now you shall see how docile I am. At a small straw-bonnet shop close to the market-house, I have seen a very pretty little bonnet, larger than a daisy—which I know would exactly fit me; and I can buy some blue ribbon and make the curtain, and put on the strings myself.”

“That sounds more reasonable; but, scarcely larger than a daisy?—my poor child, your head requires shade.”

“Which it can’t have, except in a hat, unless I have an absolute basket. You know, Isabella, one must be guided a little by the fashion. Remember Mrs. Frances Reynolds’ aphorism—‘To aim at leading the fashion argues little sense—not to follow it, still less.’”

“Well, my dear girl, it is something quite new to hear you advocating that side of the question.”

“Why, was it not you,” said Marian, rather

quickly, "who called my dress plebeian? I do not wish to look otherwise than a lady."

With a smile, I replied, "You cannot."

As we reached Miss Linnet's gate, she suddenly said, "Don't say anything about the crab!" and blushed extremely.

"Certainly not," said I. "It was a disagreeable occurrence, and had best be kept between ourselves."

"Things get about so," said Marian, "and are so distorted; even by such a harmless person as Miss Linnet. One does not wish to be known along the row as the young lady that had the crab tied on to her hair. I dare say the person who did it little thought of the annoyance it might occasion—or is very sorry for it now."

"Madmen don't let such freaks trouble their consciences," said I.

"Isabella, you *will* have your own way

about that! I think you will prove mistaken."

I asked her why: but, just then, we saw Miss Linnet at the door; so my question was unanswered.

The little straw bonnet was bought, and trimmed, and worn; but though Marian's appearance was much improved by it, its deficiency in shade was such that she used to carry an umbrella with her to the beach; and this was so cumbersome that she was glad to avail herself of a parasol almost as large, lent her by Miss Linnet, who told her she need have no scruple in using it, as it had been purposely left behind by the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon.

Jacintha would have scorned using a second-hand parasol; but, luckily, Marian was less fastidious, and had a greater regard for comfort: so under this large parasol she and her

little bonnet found ample shelter. We continued to sit on the shingle a good deal, but our feeling of security was gone; at least, when we recollected what had happened, which, of course, was not always. However, I kept a much sharper look-out about us than before, and was conscious of something of a duenna-like feeling.

Marian had not forgotten her *proéctgé*, the lame lad, and she now supplied him with two or three new designs for his sand-drawings. Tasteless productions they were, at best; and yet they were more saleable, apparently, than many things I should have considered better worth the money. They hit the popular taste; and John Frost was so elated by his success that he talked of raising his price from one shilling to two, from which we strongly dissuaded him. Poor fellow! he was a pitiable object; and I think many of the sixpences and shillings he obtained must have been

given from sheer compassion: but his self-respect was not lowered thereby; and probably few of our best painters felt a more self-sufficing independence.

There was a curious old round chimney and ruinous gable overgrown with ivy, about ten minutes' walk from the back of Miss Linnet's house, which Marian thought she should like to sketch. But it was across a ploughed field; so I only accompanied her to its verge, and promised to await her under the hedge. She arranged the old shawl for my seat, and then left me basking in the sun.

I had been knitting very comfortably some minutes, and was thinking of Mary Barnet and her good father, when I heard a low voice close behind me, say—

“ Jack, here he is ! ”

I looked hastily round, and met the large, bright eyes of some one on the other side of

the hedge in a crouching position. He started almost as much as I did, but immediately turned his head, and in an eager but suppressed voice, repeated—

“Jack, here he is, I say! Bring the cage, or he’ll bite my fingers.”

I felt very uncomfortable, and began to put up my work. Jack, meanwhile, seemed to come up, for the speaker continued—

“Mrs. Rat-tat is not within, though there are a lot of young ones. Only think, the old gentleman has fifteen partridge-eggs in his larder!”

“We must give him some water,” says Jack, “or he’ll die in five minutes. They’re unaccountable thirsty.”

“Hush!” says the other in a low voice, “there’s a lady the other side the hedge.”

“The pretty one?” whispers Jack, eagerly.

“No—the other.”

What a compliment ! Somehow, I began to have an impression that this couple, whom I had immediately decided on as the madman and his keeper, could not be in such an uncomfortable relation to each other—they seemed on better terms.

Just then, the furious bark of a savage dog in the distance, followed by a scream, made me involuntarily cry out and start up, for I was sure Marian was in danger.

“What’s the matter, ma’am ?” cried Mr. Jack’s companion, springing over the hedge, with excitement depicted in his good-looking countenance.

“Nothing—oh yes !—a dog has flown at her, I’m afraid !” cried I, disjointedly, “and I’m lame—Oh, do run !”

“Trust me for it,” said he, darting off like lightning.

“Allow me,” said Mr. Jack, swinging himself

over a gate close by, "to escort you, ma'am, over the furrows," holding his hat above his head.

He was unmistakeably a gentleman, about two or three-and-twenty; not so comely as his companion, but with a pale, lantern-jawed face, which, however, was full of fun and *espiéglerie*. I was declining his courtesy with a distant bow, when it struck me I was barely polite to the Achates of the hero I had sent to Marian's rescue, and I therefore said—

"Thank you, sir, but I would much rather you should go to the assistance of my sister."

"Frank is but too happy, ma'am, to be in attendance on her," replied Mr. Jack, with the utmost courtesy, "and all danger is over, for he has thrown a stone at the dog, and is now escorting the young lady over the clods—I wish there were many such clod-hoppers!"

As it was not clear which of them he meant, I said nothing; and the pair having now

reached us within speaking distance, apparently in fluent talk, the young gentleman cried out—

“Jack! only think—I know this lady very well!”

“Goodness! what will she say to the crab?” ejaculated Jack.

“Knows her very well!” repeated I to myself, in dismay. “Pray, sir, who is your friend?” I inquired abruptly.

“Who, ma’am? Mr. Frank Duncan of Pendynas,—Frank by name, and frank by nature; and your humble servant is John Jekyl, at your service.”

“Isabella!” said Marian, approaching me with heightened colour, “this is Mr. Francis Duncan—cousin of *our* Mr. Duncan, you know.”

I remembered very well. “How very singular!” said I, returning his bow and smile. “I had no idea!”

“Nor I, I’m sure,” said he. “Most fortunate occurrence. I shall be fond of barking dogs as long as I live !”

“So very odd !” said Marian.

“Chance meetings often occur at watering-places,” said I. “Pray, sir, have you been here long ?”

“Only about ten days, ma’am. My friend Mr. Jekyl had been working his brain rather too hard.”

(“So *he’s* the madman !”) thought I.

“And, as I had been doing the very same thing, we agreed to come here and rusticate a little, and live as much as possible in the open air. We are civil engineers, Miss Middlemass : Jack is a surprising fellow—he’ll cut through the Alps some day ; in fact, he is meditating some such project e’en now—and the seeing his way right through it, like an avenue, had such an effect on his brain, poor dear fellow,

that he was ready to faint away on the spot. So, before he did himself any more harm, I got him down here, with consent of friends, and undertook to be his keeper."

"So that explains—" said I, hastily.

"Explains what?" said Mr. Duncan.

As I did not reply, he went on—"Undertook to keep him as much from study, and as much amused, as could be. So, just now, we were catching a rat. We are both great naturalists, and I believe our landlady is sufficiently annoyed at the spoils we carry home. You know sea-blubbers? The other day we carried her one, of enormous circumference, and told her to dress it for dinner. You should have seen her look!"

"She must have thought you mad," said I, hastily.

"She *does*, ma'am—she thinks so of Jack; and we play a little upon her fears. When he

gave her his orders about the sea-blubber, she gave me such a terrified look, and I just nodded and made a face; so then she told him she would have obliged him with pleasure, but that she was afraid she had not a fish-kettle large enough."

"Dear me, but you should not foster such reports!" said I.

"Why not?" said Mr. Duncan. "I have not told one single untruth about it—only if old ladies *will* be silly, you know—Are you curious in polypi, Miss Middlemass? or sea-anemones?"

"No," said I, "but my sister is."

"Do allow me to procure her some, then!" cried he: and, by some sudden changing of positions, I found Mr. Jekyl walking at my side, and Mr. Duncan beside Marian. We were now very slowly pacing our way to the beach; and Mr. Jekyl had possessed himself

of my old shawl, which, in spite of me, he would carry.

“No, no,” said he, holding it at arm’s length, “I have an ulterior purpose for this shawl; and you owe me some reparation, Miss Middlemass—for you have been the means of my losing a most valuable rat. So you really are acquainted with my friends, the Duncans?”

“Not with *your* friend’s branch,” said I, distinctly: “only with his cousins.”

“Only?—and why only? Mr. James Duncan I have always understood to be a most upright, excellent man.”

“Indeed he is,” I replied, “and his sweet little wife is quite worthy of him. We have their two little girls under our care.”

He looked rather at fault, but I had discharged my conscience, as the equivocal saying is, and I did not think it needful, just then, to be more explicit.

“Here,” said he, as we came to a small, isolated rock projecting from the sand, which people often used for a seat, “here is the spot where I hope to make your shawl useful, if it is not too costly and precious.”

I hoped he would confine his irony, veiled though it was, to the old shawl, which he proceeded to spread officiously on the rock for our accommodation.

“Thank you,” said I, “but I think we must now go in, for we are both rather tired.”

“Then you both need rest, surely,” expostulated Mr. Jekyl, “and your sister looks delicate.”

This was touching a tender cord, so I relented and sat down, but sat on thorns. Meanwhile, my younger companions, in no wise troubled by my old-maidish perplexities, were discoursing gaily on the beauty of the tide, now coming in, and watching for the ninth wave.

“What’s that?” cried Mr. Jekyl, as something was thrown ashore.

“Something quaint and strange, rely upon it,” cried his volatile companion, starting up and running towards it.

“Don’t let us disturb ourselves,” said Mr. Jekyl, coolly, when he was gone; “it is nothing but an old hat.”

Mr. Duncan, however, was crying out—
“Jack! Jack! here’s the biggest *Rhizostoma Cuvieri* you ever saw in your life. Do come!”

“A what?” said I.

“A *Medusa*—a sea-blubber,” explained Mr. Jekyl; “I’ve had enough of them—I shan’t go—I like sitting here better. Let’s pretend not to hear him.”

“Do come!” reiterated his friend.

“No, no; I don’t want to see the nasty creature dissolving in the sun.”

“Do come, Miss Middlemass! Miss Marian Middlemass!”

I did not stir, but Marian took compassion on him, and went to look at it, in spite of my saying, “No, Marian—better not—” which, I believe, she did not hear.

“She will only tire herself,” said I, in rather a dissatisfied tone.

“You do not patronize marine researches, Miss Middlemass?”

“Pray, Mr. Jekyl, have you ever studied the natural history of the crab?”

He gave me a sharp, quick look, and burst into a fit of laughter, which, however, evidently was the cover of embarrassment.

“Murder will out,” said he; “I knew—I knew it would! Miss Middlemass, if it will be the least satisfaction to you to receive my apology on my bended knees—”

“You *were*, then, the party?” cried I.

“*One* of us was,” said he. “Which of us, we have mutually resolved never to divulge. But—”

“But how could you ever presume to take such a liberty with *any* stranger—*any* lady !”

“My dear, dear madam, *pray* do not look and speak so very severely, or I shall dissolve before you like that horrible sea-blubber. It *was* a great—a gross liberty; but a little explanation and reflection will make it appear somewhat less heinous. We were in schoolboy spirits just then, and *one* of us (I say not which), seeing you seated on the shingle, with a little girl (we positively thought it was a little girl) beside you, learning her lessons, one of us said to the other, ‘I’ll bet you a dozen cigars I’ll tie a crab on to that young lady’s back hair without her finding it out;’ and the other said, ‘You won’t,’ and the first said, ‘I will;’ and so we kept on till at last what had been

said in fun and folly became a point of honour between us, and the crab was bought in soberness and solemnity—quite in the ‘Excelsior’ vein; and the knight-errant went forth with trusty squire on his emprise, and bided his time, and lay in wait, and dogged his prey, and did the deed, and—”

“Watched its effect from the window of a bathing-machine!” said I, unable to help laughing. “Oh the noble deed!”

“Precisely so: we had become intensely interested in the result—especially on discovering that our victim was no little girl, but a grown-up and beautiful young lady. Still, we did not see her near enough for Frank to recognise her; but our souls were already beginning to be harrowed by the most poignant—Oh, Miss Middlemass! they are close upon us—say, say you forgive us!”

“I am not quite sure that I do,” replied I,

gravely ; “your repentance appears to me but skin-deep, and I very much fear does not vouch for a change of character and conduct.”

“Worse and worse ! What *can* you expect in so short a time ? And, if you drive us to despair by dooming us to contempt and neglect, —Well, Frank, have you buried the blubber ?”

CHAPTER VIII.

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed,
And secret troubles laboured in her breast.

POPE.

THESE vivacious young gentlemen attended us to our own door, and their last word was a merry one, accompanied by bows of profound respect. When I entered my own room, I sat down quite breathless and perplexed. Who could tell what a tissue of circumstances might ensue from this accidental acquaintance? Here was a fine-looking young man, well-born and well connected, who had dropped, as it were, from the clouds, and who had just enough previous introduction to Marian to make him admissible, if he chose it, on terms

of easy acquaintance: and here was Marian, with her animated looks and cheerful manners, evidently very glad to see him! Well, and what then? Was I to nip the incipient intimacy in the bud, just because it *might* lead to dangerous consequences? Why, yes; I was afraid I ought: because, though her spirits were certainly likely to be improved for the time by so lively an acquaintance, yet if he made a deeper impression on her than she did on him, I might have reason to be sorry for it, and to blame myself for it all the rest of my life!

If! if! What absurdity to be thus precipitately running ahead of events! there was even something indelicate in it: I should be quite ashamed for Marian to know my thoughts. And so I rose, and arranged my dress for dinner, and took up a book, and lay down on the sofa to enjoy it.

Instead of that, I kept thinking of the bright

eyes through the hedge, and the leap over it—and the rats, and the *Medusa*, and the crab—was ever such a jumble? Who was the culprit in that affair? *Not* Mr. Jekyl, I was afraid, though he wanted me to suspect him; but of this I could not be by any means certain. Then, was it worth while to take a serious view of such a boyish frolic? But did not it argue a lightness of character, and want of proper respect for women? Well, I tried to judge harder of him than I did. But yet, on the whole, I thought it safest to keep our new acquaintance at a distance.

Therefore, when Marian said—

“I suppose we shall see a good deal of them now,” I said, “Dear me, no; why should we?” On which she held her peace. I broke silence next by saying, “Were you not very much surprised when Mr. Duncan ran up to you?”

“Yes, very,” she replied, “but I was not so very much surprised that the reputed madman should prove to be him, as you might think; because, once or twice, seeing him at a distance, his figure and air struck me as like those of some one I had seen before, and at length I remembered Mr. Francis Duncan.”

“You never said so.”

“Because I was not sure. It was only a passing thought.”

“Do you suspect him or Mr. Jekyl of having tied the crab to your hair?”

“Did they say anything to you about it?” said Marian, quickly.

“Oh, yes; Mr. Jekyl said a great deal.”

“Do tell me what he said.”

“He said he was very sorry, and that they had taken you for a little girl, and one had laid the other a wager he would do it.”

“Which one?”

“ That he would not tell.”

“ Mr. Jekyl, no doubt,” said Marian.

“ Well, I rather suspect his friend. But I fear there is not much to choose between them.”

“ Why do you fear, if both are agreeable and entertaining? ”

“ I am afraid they may not be very steady.”

“ Ah, Isabella, why are you so hard on harmless mirth? ”

“ The question is, *is it harmless?* ”

“ Yes,” said Marian, boldly. “ People need not be the less wise nor the less good for enjoying a joke as heartily as a schoolboy. I was the only sufferer, and if I can forgive and forget it (which I do), I think other people may.”

I was silenced. The afternoon proved wet, and Marian amused herself by writing a long letter to Jacintha, while I pored over “*Tre-maine.*” Just as I was in the middle of a tough theological discussion, her pen ceased

scratch scratching, and her full-filled sheet was put between me and my book, while she said, with a little laugh—

“ You may read it, if you like.”

It was a most diverting letter. Jacintha told me afterwards how she laughed over it; and we read it together again, long after, under very different circumstances. I enjoyed it thoroughly, though there were some harmless witticisms at my expense; and returned it to her with thanks, saying, I was sure it would give Jacintha a great deal of pleasure. Marian was so content with her performance, that she folded and directed it in great glee; and then saying, “ Now for my novel !” seized the other volume of “ Tremaine,” and we were both as mute as mice the rest of the evening, and perfectly happy. People may say what they will, but the writer of good and healthy novels is not useless to his kind.

The next morning, on entering the parlour, I almost stumbled over a small hamper, directed to Miss Middlemass. "What can this be? and from whom?" said I to Marian, who followed me. Impatiently cutting the packthread, with vague visions of hothouse fruit and dead game, I no sooner raised the lid a little than I dropped it in affright, exclaiming—

"It's alive!"

"What is alive?" cried Marian.

"All sorts of things inside!" said I, timidly peeping in again.

"Crabs?" said Marian, inspecting its contents more boldly. There was, indeed, a noble crab, not boiled, this time, but spreading its feelers all about, and also some sea-anemones, and wriggling shrimps and prawns, great sprawling star-fishes, acorn-barnacles, and mermaids'-gloves, mingling in most admired dis-

order, with choice specimens, no doubt, of sack-sponge, crumb-sponge, and sea-weeds, too numerous to mention.

“What a hideous collection!” said I in disgust. “Who could think of sending it to me?”

“To *me*!” said Marian, smiling, as she pointed to the letter M. prefixed to Middlemass. “The direction is on one of Mr. Jekyl’s cards, with ‘compliments from the gentlemen at No. 3.’”

“Absurd creatures!” said I. “There is not one thing in the basket worth having, except the crab.”

“And the shrimps,” said Marian, “and the prawns: and the sea-weeds are very pretty, and the sponges curious. See, they have nicely ticketed them all for me, with the Latin and English names. These anemones are beautiful! I must put them in water, pretty crea-

tures, and then they will throw out their feelers."

"Well, the crab and the shrimps can be carried down at any rate," said I, ringing the bell, "or we shall have them crawling or jumping all over the room. And I don't see how either of the young gentlemen was called on to make us a present of any kind—it was very forward of them, I think."

After breakfast we took our books and work to the shingle. No one was there; but before we had long established ourselves there, I saw, without raising my head, two long skeleton shadows noiselessly advancing over the hard sands. Marian, I presume, saw them too, for she gave my elbow a little touch and whispered, mischievously—

"Here they come—let us pretend not to see them!"

So I pored over my work, and she over her

book ; and the two long shadows stalked slowly past, and methought I heard a whisper of—

“ Jack ! they’ve cut us ! ”

After they were fairly gone, Marian and I triumphed over our *ruse*, though I am not quite sure whether, on second thoughts, she had found the game worth the candle. After musing awhile, she reverted to her book, and read to me a passage which had struck her. She thought Evelyn might have given Tremaine’s objection a better answer ; and we discussed the question seriously for some time, and agreed that he might.

Having sat rather longer than usual, we rose to take our usual turn on the sands ; and I was glancing round in a casual way to see whether our young beaux were again in sight, when, lo ! they were close to us ! Immediately, both hats off, with polite inquiries after our health. To which I, as politely

though more distantly, rejoined, while Marian, with less formality and more cordiality, thanked each and both for the basket of curiosities.

“Merely the result of our morning’s sport,” said Mr. Duncan, disclaimingly: “Jack and I get a good swim early, and pick up a few curiosities by the way. I flatter myself, though, you found a tolerable fine specimen of the *Balanus porcatus* in the basket?”

“Really, I don’t know,” said Marian, amused.

“Or acorn-barnacle. Surely I ticketed it? It has a large, furrowed shell. Oh, why don’t men now live as long as Methusaleh? The study of the *Balani* alone would suffice an ordinary lifetime.”

“If the interest did not flag,” suggested Marian. “Mine would, I think.”

“Oh, you have not tried. Just put those *Balani* I sent you into a large earthen pan of

sea-water, and watch the changes through which they pass—you will find them most astonishing! Their transformations have been only recently ascertained.”

“I am afraid they are dead,” said Marian.

“Dead!” cried he, aghast, as if she had been speaking of some nice little child. “Oh, you don’t know what you’ve lost! Why, I’ve a bucketful, that afford me intense interest. I am afraid, Miss Marian, you do not find pleasure in studying the wonders of creation.”

Marian looked rather ashamed at so serious a charge, and began to assure him they interested her very much, only she knew so little about them—she wished she knew more. Down they sat on our favourite rock, and were soon deep in *Balani* and *Actiniæ*; while I, very glad to rest, was telling Mr. Jekyl how impossible I found it to realize their being civil engineers.

“Why?” asked he, briskly. “Because we were so uncivil about the crab?”

“No,” said I, “but I thought civil engineering required steady brains, and thoughtful application.”

“Our brains are steady enough on ordinary occasions, ma’am, I can tell you; and it is only because we have applied them to thought rather too much, that we are refreshing ourselves just now with a little relaxation. All work and no play makes Jack Jekyl a dull boy. And there’s no fear of all play and no work making Frank a mere toy. Oh, no! we shall be hard at it again shortly: and then you’ll be pleased. If you see in the *Times*’ columns the following announcement—‘Died, on the 16th ultimo, at the Steephill Viaduct, John Jekyl, Esq., aged twenty-two, of intense mental application, to the inexpressible grief of numerous friends and relatives; and, on

the 4th proximo, of excessive grief for the same, and an overwrought mind, Francis Duncan, Esq., aged twenty-three, the pride of his country, and the flower of his family'—then you'll be delighted!"

"No, I shall not," said I, laughing.

"Yes, ma'am, you will. I can see it in your eye. My own belief is, you are a lady of such superior endowments, that my only chance of making myself tolerably agreeable to you will be by opening up some subject which you don't quite understand. Well, then, suppose we discuss the broad and narrow gauge. Or the 'Geordy' safety-lamp. Or, suppose, the construction of the multitubular boiler?"

"Oh, spare me, spare me!" said I.

"You laugh as if there were no such thing. Come, let us take a common-sense view of some open question. The fitting of copper tubes, so as to prevent leakage, for instance.

That strikes me as a simple and pleasing subject—especially to ladies. Formerly, you are aware, they were manufactured by a Newcastle coppersmith, and soldered to brass screws, which were screwed into the boiler ends, standing out in great, ugly knobs. Well—with tubes thus nastily fitted, and hydraulic pressure applied (the boiler, of course, being filled), you may readily believe, Miss Middlemass, that the water would squirt out at every joint, and flood the floor of the factory. To avoid this disagreeable consequence—My dear ma'am, are you going? Now, don't! I have not told you the expedient that was found: one of the neatest things in science! Now, *don't* go! Wind cold? I'll run for an umbrella. Rain coming on? Nothing of the sort. Tide coming in? It won't be over our shoes these ten minutes—unless, indeed, an uncommonly large wave—Well, here comes one, and I believe we must run for it!”

With two such inexhaustible subjects as civil engineering and natural history, it may well be supposed that these fluent young gentlemen found enough to say between the beach and Miss Linnet's. Mr. Duncan was deep in the gambols of the Cyclop or water-flea, while Mr. Jekyl was equally diffuse on smoke-boxes and blast-pipes. Arriving at our door, they both looked inquisitively and anxiously at me, in hopes I should ask them to enter—but I didn't. Mr. Duncan said he was very much wishing to know if the acorn-barnacles were really dead; but I pretended not to hear. Mr. Jekyl said, "To-morrow is Sunday, Miss Middle-mass, and you may suppose a couple of young fellows would not encumber themselves with much heavy reading. You could not lend me a good book, could you?"

There is nothing I hate like hypocrisy! I darted a look that was enough to pierce him

through and through, saying, "If I do, will you read it?"

"Certainly I will," returned he, as with unaffected surprise at my query. "Why, else, should I ask for one? Only don't let it be too dry, that's all. Don't ask me in! I'll wait upon the mat."

But I did ask him in, though grudgingly; for it would have been a sin to miss even the ninety-ninth chance in a hundred of putting one steady thought into such a volatile head; and, as I merely said, "Oh, come in," Mr. Duncan did not follow, but remained talking to Marian on the door-step, and presently was inspecting the defunct barnacle in the passage.

"I really do believe," said Mr. Jekyl, in a low voice, as he followed me to our little row of books, treading as gingerly as if on eggs—"I really do believe that you have adopted the opinion of my being a very bad fellow—and I

feel injured accordingly. I do assure you, I have been brought up in a Christian home, and had something above the average Christian training—and so has Frank. What have we here? ‘Tremaine!’ is *that* a Sunday book, Miss Middlemass?”

“No,” said I, with decision.

“‘Young’s Night Thoughts.’ *Can* you expect me to take that? ‘Butler’s Analogy’—that’s capital, but takes a deal of thinking. ‘Sermons on Subjects selected from Scripture Biography’—Bible-and-water. The Bible itself is far more interesting than books of this sort. Borrow’s ‘Bible in Spain’—oh, *do* lend me that! No?—oh, you must!—I’ll read it to-day! I’ll read it this present Saturday! *Do* lend me that! Thank you, thank you! I’ll take another for to-morrow. ‘Life of Robert Hall.’ That’s good, is not it? Very well, that will do—Thank you! thank you!”

And away they went. Somehow or other, they had supplied us with plenty to talk about, during the rest of the morning. Some of the marine reptilia were found in fine condition, and Marian was dabbling her pretty fingers in their salt-water bath frequently during the day.

The afternodn's post brought me an unexpected letter from Mrs. Duncan. Directly I saw it was from her, I was convinced Mr. Francis Duncan had written to her. After kind inquiries about our health, and brief allusion to her own, she proceeded to say—

“I dare say you have found out by this time that Frank is lodging close to you. Do take a little compassion on the poor fellow—he has always been quite a home-boy, very dependent on female society, and, I must say for him, is a pretty general favourite with the ladies. He deserves to be so, certainly; for a sweeter temper

and better heart cannot easily be found. He is very steady too, and has more beneath the surface than you would think. He and his friend Mr. Jekyl have been pursuing their profession much too ardently, and the consequence in Mr. Jekyl's case, was nearly a brain fever. Give my love to them both, and pray take compassion on them, and let them see as much of you as they can."

"Are you satisfied now, Isabella?" said Marian, with a mischievous smile, as she returned me the letter.

"Certainly," said I, "though I believe they would not care much for seeing as much of *me* as they can, if you were not included in the bargain."

Marian laughed and said, "They must take us as they find us."

"Which they seem quite ready to do," said I.

That night, just as we were thinking of going to bed, a violent ring at the house-bell was succeeded by Mr. Duncan's voice in the hall.

"Tell Miss Middlemass, with Mr. Duncan's compliments, that there is a most splendid phosphorescent illumination of the sea."

While the girl was hammering at these long words, I went out, and in my blandest manner said, "Come in—pray come in!"

"Oh, you are too good," said he, immediately entering, followed closely by his friend; "I am afraid we shall incommode you—but the sea really looks so beautiful that it is a pity you should lose the sight. I suppose you are afraid of going down to the beach, even with our escort?"

"Quite," said I, shunning Marian's persuasive look, and drawing up the blind. "We can observe it perfectly well here, you see."

"Better with the window open, though,"

said Mr. Jekyl, throwing up the sash. The candles were immediately blown out.

“Jack, shut the window,” said Mr. Duncan, imperatively : “Miss Middlemass is afraid of the cold.”

“No, not for a few minutes,” said I, drawing my shawl round me. “How beautiful it is !”

“‘How beautiful is night !’” said Mr. Duncan ; and went through the whole passage very feelingly.

“See,” cried he, “how every stroke of that boatman’s oars illumines the dark water under his boat’s quarter. Jack, we must have a pailful of these *noctiluca* ; and, by the by, Miss Middlemass, if you have a bucketful in your bedroom, it will serve you as a night-light.”

After a little more desultory chat, they took leave ; Mr. Duncan saying, “You’ll be glad to get rid of the dog and his shadow !”

CHAPTER IX.

The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on Time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal, glorious king.
On Sunday, heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and ripe,
More plentiful than hope.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IT was a beautiful Sabbath morning ; warm, but fresh ; and the tide coming in, sparkled in the sun. Happily for us, the little old Saxon church was so near as to be quite accessible to us ; and thither Marian and I repaired, full of thankfulness that we were able to “go up to the house of the Lord in company.”

Though there was such a moderate sprinkling of visitors at Fishport, yet when they were

all packed together with the regular inhabitants into this little church, it was full to overflowing. Marian's pretty muslin dress had somehow found its way down to her, and her new bonnet became her well, so that never had I seen her look prettier; but she was one of those who, having once dressed themselves to their mind, take no more thought about the matter, and I am convinced that she was not in the least occupied with her looks, to the distraction of her thoughts from better subjects. On the contrary, she was almost too keenly alive to the impressions of the service, and I observed her more than once sensibly affected by it, and wiping away a quiet tear. Except for that, her demeanour was characterised by a chastened seriousness.

Countrymen in carters' frocks sat on one side of the church, and country-women and lasses in their gay Sunday clothes on the other

—but these were in free seats: the upper and middling classes were rather crowded into pews, and every “coign of vantage,” even to the pulpit stairs, had its occupants. We went early, yet the church was quite full; bonnets, blue, pink, white, primrose, made the *tout ensemble* as gay as a flower-bed, yet the silence was such that I could hear the little birds singing in the churchyard. There were swallows, too, that had built inside the church, and kept flying over our heads.

Just as the hand-organ was performing its only voluntary before the service, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl were put into the pew before us. I conclude they were conscious of our proximity, but they certainly did not betray it; and never did I know two young men conduct themselves more reverently and becomingly in the house of prayer. I was glad to hear them not only join in the singing but in

the responses, and to see them use their little Bibles when the lessons were read.

Mr. Carp, the curate, was a forcible and interesting preacher, capable of arresting the attention. I think I remember almost verbatim one thing he said—"When we come, not merely to *read* the Scriptures, but to *know* them, a thousand little twinkling lights break in upon us, reflecting glory on one another, till, at length, they disclose themselves like suns, each the centre of its own luminous system."

Of course, our young friends found their way to us when we left the church, but they were so quiet and serious that there was nothing but pure pleasure in our intercourse with them. They had evidently attended closely to the sermon from the remarks they made on it, which were in a good spirit.

Just as we reached our gate, I thought—

“We are not in the habit of receiving Sunday visitors, but, if these young men spend a quiet hour or two with us in the evening, may it not be a good and pleasant thing for them?” My answer to myself was, Yes; and therefore, just as we were entering the house, I said, “Perhaps, after evening service, you will give us the pleasure of your company to tea.”

I never saw more irrepressible satisfaction light up human faces! Even Marian could not conceal her smiles. “Certainly, certainly, with the greatest pleasure!” cried Mr. Duncan. “You include us *both*, I believe?” (I had addressed *him*.)

“Am I not a man and a brother?” said Mr. Jekyl to him, indignantly. “Miss Middlemass spoke in the plural.”

“Undoubtedly I did,” said I, smiling. And they bowed low, and wished us good morning.

What a pleasant Sunday that was ! We discussed our cold lamb and gooseberry tart quite cheerfully, only wishing Jacintha were with us, and afterwards we both lay down and quietly read our Bibles till church-time. There was not so full a congregation as in the morning, and as we were rather early, we found Mr. Carp catechizing some of the school-children, which I thought he did extremely well.

This time the pew-opener showed our two friends into the pew in which we were already placed ; and I observed Marian and Mr. Duncan sharing the same hymn-book, though she did not sing.

Why it should so have been, I know not, but certainly the Misses Linnet took a lively interest in the unexampled event of our having visitors to tea. Accordingly, quite without a hint on my part, the dry toast and buttered roll were flanked with a glass saucer of pre-

served apricots, and a plate of rich plum-cake, that must, I am sure, have been among Miss Linnet's most treasured hoards. Cream, too, supplied the place of milk, and we had the best china.

I cannot say any of these kind attentions were thrown away, either on us or our guests. The meal was a very social one; we talked over the sermons, discussed the merits of our favourite preachers in town and country, and our favourite books on divinity, by authors alive and dead. I found our companions had a good deal to say on these subjects. Then we talked about George Borrow; and Mr. Jekyl wanted to know whether he meant his narratives to be considered entirely true, and considered the amount of good a missionary-errant might do as pioneer, and thought he should like such a career himself, if he were not privileged to be a civil engineer.

Then we talked of home-influences, and school-influences, and influences of travel, and influences of different professions; and the advantages of seclusion and of society, of education, and of self-teaching; of help, just at the right moment, and of being thrown on our own resources.

Then we considered the allowances that ought to be made for people who had very few advantages; how doubly, trebly hard it must be to them to be under moral and religious restraints; how often they must be puzzled and embarrassed what course to pursue; how difficult they must find it to resist temptation.

We spoke of the lot of the poor; the difficulty of doing them good in their own way, and of getting to their hearts; the barrier placed by circumstances between them and the rich; the different points of view in which they must see things.

We spoke of sympathy—of the inestimable value of it, and how it trebled one's working powers ; of the sympathy of sisters and mothers ; of the blessing of having a chosen friend.

All this was diversified, very naturally, with anecdotes, and scraps of personal experience ; so that the dialogue never became heavy, though it was often very interesting.

Meantime, I was conscious that supper-time and prayer-time were approaching ; and yet these young gentlemen seemed not to have a thought of moving off. In a fit of desperation, I at length said, with an air of pleasantry—

“Those who stay to supper, stay to prayers. Neither, or both, gentlemen ?”

“Both !” cried they simultaneously, and I rang the bell.

I knew there was little I could order to be brought in, except the cold meat, for Marian and I supped on biscuits ; but, directly the door

was opened, I heard something frying in the kitchen, and a delicate aroma of bacon penetrated into the room.

That excellent creature, Miss Linnet, of her own accord, had garnished the cold lamb, set out the tart, and prepared an incomparable dish of poached eggs and fried bacon, to which our guests, who, like ourselves, had dined early, did ample justice.

Our little prayer-service seemed to cement all hearts, and to be a becoming close to a happy and well-spent day. We shook hands cordially on parting; and our guests declared they had never spent a more delightful evening.

I could not help thanking Miss Linnet afterwards, for her improved arrangements. She waved her hand, and said with the air of a duchess—

“Don’t mention it, my dear ma’am. I have

been young myself, and could enter into Miss Marian's—into your feelings on the occasion. Moreover, had it put me to some little expense (which it did not), I would gladly have incurred it, within my limited means, as an atonement for the awkward mistake I made in supposing so gentlemanlike a young man as Mr. Duncan could be a—fie ! fie ! we won't mention it ! ”

She was flourishing out of the room, when she turned back to say—“ As for the apricot-preserve, it was left behind by the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon ; and the wedding-cake was a noble slice graciously sent me by the sole child and heiress of Mr. Twiddy, our most eminent confectioner (indeed we have but one), on the occasion of her marriage with Mr. Claudius Fish of Cheapside. Ah, that *was* a wedding indeed ! I will dilate on it on some future occasion—I only know of *one* pair of young persons who, should they ever come

together (and who knows what futurity may have in store!)—but no, no! I won't presume on the subject!" And she hastened out.

"Miss Linnet deals in riddles to-night," said Marian, looking rather red.

The next morning brought us a cheerful letter from Jacintha, who was anticipating the holidays, now close at hand, with great glee. She hoped to join us in a few days. John and Laura had very kindly pressed her to visit them, but she had declined; she thought she should be happier with us—she did not want gaiety.

The affectionate tone of this letter pleased us much—a line of genuine affection is worth a dozen of common-place news! A dozen? I might have said a thousand. We walked down to our favourite seat, and looked around us with delight, thinking how Jacintha would enjoy the beautiful sea and fresh sea-breezes.

Of course our usual companions soon strolled up to us. But they were in very low spirits—their holiday was up, and they were going away the very next day. Under these circumstances, I resolved to invite them to drink tea with us, but not immediately. So we fell into rather a serious-toned talk, till presently Mr. Jekyl remarked—

“The Reverend Eugenius Carp has been here before us, I see. Observe, Miss Middlemass, the impression of his tread all along the sand.”

“Why his, rather than any other’s?” inquired I, with surprise.

“Do you seriously ask? Because he has had his left boot new-heeled, which has left rather a different print from the other. I noticed it was so, in accidentally following him on Saturday. Nay, Miss Annington has been closely following him, apparently; don’t you see the impression of her French clogs?”

“Really, you observe rather too closely!” said I, somewhat scandalized.

“How can that be? I have been taught, ma’am, that a scientific man *cannot* observe too closely. From the cradle, my prime object has been ‘how to observe.’ Ridiculous and sometimes dangerous mistakes are made by so-called philosophers, for no other reason than that they begin at the wrong end—reflect first and observe second (if at all); whereas they should observe first—ay, once and again! and again to that!—and reflect afterwards. Consequence is, they shape their observations to their reflections, instead of their reflections to their observations, and no wonder they make a mess of it—

“However,” resumed he, “though my observation enables me to discern that Miss Annington has closely followed in Mr. Carp’s track, I had not the least intention of insinuat-

ing that she did so in company with him, or that he was even in sight. Nay, she may have preceded him, and he followed after, like little Jack Lag. I do not even know them to be on speaking terms, though I conclude she admires his preaching, as I observed her taking notes of his sermon yesterday, on ivory tablets."

"Reflection would have been better there than observation," said I.

"It would," said Mr. Jekyl: "only I really can't *help* observing, unless I shut my eyes: and when people shut their eyes they are apt to fall asleep—or to be thought asleep by censorious observers with their eyes open, which is nearly as bad."

"Not quite," said I.

"It only shifts the sin into another quarter," said Mr. Jekyl. "However, that is something."

We tarried longer than usual, that morning,

on the beach ; sitting down to rest and renew our pleasant chat several times. The weather was so lovely ! the tide came in so grandly ! We were driven by it from our seat at last ; and, when we reached home, were surprised to find it was just the time of our early dinner. As for the boarding-house luncheon bell, it had been loudly ringing for its two truants in vain.

Amused as we had been, we were both a good deal tired, and glad to rest ourselves on the two little couches after dinner. I believe I was beginning to doze, when a loud double-knock drove off my impending slumbers, and I rose from my reclining position without dreaming that any one but Mr. Duncan or his friend could be likely to enter.

Instead of either, Miss Linnet, all in a flutter, announced, “Mrs. De Wright !—that is, Mrs. Wright !” and, much to my surprise, in sailed that little lady, very much dressed,

and scented, and looking extremely consequential, but very good-humoured and affable.

Mrs. De Wright (I beg her pardon—Mrs. Wright) was one of those who use a dozen words when one would suffice; and after a rather meandering preamble about intrusion, no introduction, &c., she went on to say that she had heard our school so very well spoken of by her friend Mrs. Meade, that, finding from her we were so close at hand, she had called to make personal inquiries whether we could, and would, undertake the charge of her two little girls at the end of the holidays.

Of course, I was highly gratified; and we were entering into very fluent discourse on the subject, when, lo! *another* loud knock prepared us for the entrance of our two young friends, whom we (or at least I) had previously expected.

I was very much amused at their startled

and disappointed looks on finding the field pre-occupied; and equally so at Mrs. Wright's quick, bright glance at them from head to foot, and the expression which her countenance seemed to me to reveal of her determination, "Here I shall remain till I see who and what they are!"

After a few general remarks, they both seemed to consider Mrs. Wright my peculiar property, and devoted themselves both to the amusement of Marian; but I detected, or thought I detected, in every tone, an avowal that they thought Mrs. Wright in the way, and wished her out of it. Mrs. Wright, however, seemed in no hurry to gratify them: once or twice, the conversation became general, and very entertaining—I could see that she was amused and pleased, and I liked her the better for it. Then we again divided into two parties, and I told her in a low voice, of the long season

of sickness and trial we had had, and how ill Marian had been, and how her desire for usefulness had thrown her back ; and how Jacintha was now generously undertaking the whole burthen of the school, in order that we might return to it, invigorated and refreshed, after the holidays.

To all this Mrs. Wright listened with interest and sympathy, though she seemed to have heard a good deal about it from Mrs. Meade. Then her eyes seemed irresistibly drawn to the others : she looked earnestly at Marian, and then said aside to me, “ How very pretty your sister is !—I think her quite lovely ! ”

I smiled, and made a little bow.

“ There is something uncommon in her style,” she presently added softly ; “ so simple, and noble : a mixture of intellect and sweetness. One of those who become everything they wear.”

I could only smile and look pleased.

“I should think,” she pursued, “she has very winning ways with children.”

“Very,” said I: and then I spoke of the devoted attachment entertained for her by Fanny Ward, and of the manner in which it had influenced and ripened Fanny’s character.

“Ah, I can quite believe it,” said Mrs. Wright. “Children are sensible to the charm of manner, and to the attraction of good looks, as well as to kindness and sympathy. For my part, I always prefer having pretty nurses for them, though some people are so afraid of pretty servants. But I never find they have better principles for having ugly faces: and a married lady must have a very poor opinion of herself (drawing herself up a little), if she can be jealous or envious of her maid.”

At this crisis, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl, beginning to consider the case hopeless, rose in despair to take leave; and, as they did so, I said with a smile—

“As we are to lose you so soon, perhaps you will drink tea with us this evening?”

“Oh, certainly, certainly,” said they, with undisguised glee.

“I suppose I must say eight o’clock?”

“Oh no! seven, if you please! That is, if it suits you, it will suit us.”

“It will suit me better than eight. Then, so let it be.”

When they were gone, Mrs. Wright possessed herself of their names, observed they were fine young men, and seemed to have a fine flow of animal spirits; then, after a few general remarks, took leave.

CHAPTER X.

In various talk th' instructive hours they passed.

POPE.

WHEN our visitors joined us at tea-time, Mr. Jekyl asked me if I remembered the words of an old glee—

“O, why to be happy a moment forbear,
From a dread that to-morrow will darken with care?”

I replied, that it sounded rather Anacreontic.

“Ah, but Frank and I feel anything but Anacreontic,” replied he, “when we think that to-morrow we shall be off to the west. Oh dear, we must beware of letting it poison the enjoyment of this evening!”

“Why should it not rather enhance it?” said I.

“ Ay, why? why? By the by, what a grudge I owed that lady in the pink bonnet this afternoon for monopolizing you as she did! There was Frank like a wall of ice between me and Miss Marian, and I was obliged to sit mute as a shrimp!”

“ I think you do yourself injustice,” said I: “ I heard you utter several sprightly remarks.”

“ Sprightly! Oh, what a horrid word!”

“ Some ingenious ones, too.”

“ Ingenious is a quaint, old-fashioned word, to which I do not altogether object in its primary signification. My remarks were characterized by genius! I hope I shall prove a man of genius some day. Frank and I concerted something between us this morning, as we paced the sands, that may or may not prove valuable.”

“ What was it?”

“ Something relating to tunnelling through quicksands.”

“ Surely that is impossible? ” said I.

“ Impossible is not in the civil engineer’s vocabulary,” said Mr. Jekyl, gravely; and he then explained to me what I understood, or thought I understood, to be the solution of a very formidable difficulty.

All this time I am giving a very undue prominence to Mr. Jekyl’s conversation and mine, simply because, from his addressing himself so continually to me, I could not hear one word Mr. Duncan said to Marian; but, from the expression of her countenance, wreathed in smiles, I judged it to be equally entertaining. When we drew round the tea-table the dialogue became more equally distributed, and pleasantly alternated between grave and gay.

Later in the evening, the graver character certainly predominated. They appeared unaffectedly sorry to leave us; and, for my part, I was surprised to find what an element of

friendship and cordiality had sprung up in the acquaintance of a week. We expressed mutual hopes of meeting again somewhere and somehow, though our hopes bore no present prospect of being realized.

The last adieu was spoken—and we heard their retreating steps. I looked at Marian: she seemed serious and sorry. “Well,” said she, brightening as she caught my eye, “they have made the time pass very pleasantly. And now—

‘They have come, they have gone, we have met,
And shall meet perhaps never again.’

But I am sure it must be bed-time, and I am so tired!”

The next morning was very flat; but Marian encountered it bravely. She resumed her bathing, which always invigorated her; and, as we settled ourselves on the beach afterwards, she said, laughing, “I think I need not

be afraid of any more adventures with crabs.” Mrs. Wright strolled up to us, and chatted, which passed time a little. Afterwards, the lad who sold sand-drawings came limping up, with pleasure and triumph in his face, and, said he—

“ You thought two shillings would be too great a rise, ma’am, but I know’d it wouldn’t ! I sold the whole lot on ’em at two shillings a-piece, and might ha’ got more.”

“ How so, John ? Who bought them ? ”

“ Them two young gen’lemen as walked the sands in jackets—they asked me very pertikler whether you done ’em all, and when I said yes, they bought ’em every one.”

“ Well, John, but I didn’t do them all ! ”

“ All that I had with me, miss, I assure ’ee ; and now I must set to work and do some more ! ”

“ Such tasteless things for them to buy,”

said Marian, half laughing, as her *protégé* limped off. "However, it shows that people only want a little memento of the place."

"And the person," I could not help slyly adding. She gave me an amused look, and echoed, "And the person."

On our return, we found Mr. Carp had left his card, which we were not particularly surprised at, as Miss Linnet told us he made a point of calling on all the visitors. In the afternoon, we met him on the sands, and bowed. The next day he called again, and found us at home. He chatted like a sensible, well-informed man; but he seemed rather tame after our young civil engineers. This was Wednesday, and Jacintha wrote to say she should be with us on Saturday; so we had something cheerful to look forward to, and really *were* cheerful. Only, we were sensible of a loss.

During the afternoon we were on the sands,

when a gentleman walked very briskly up, as if to accost us; and then exclaimed, "I beg your pardon!" turned as red as fire, and walked off. We were both amused, and at the same time could not help pitying him, it was such an evident case of short-sight. Afterwards, we were chatting with Mrs. De—, I mean Mrs. Wright, when the same party passed us, stalking along grimly erect, as much as to say, "there shall be no blunder this time."

"Why, Gregory, what are you about?" cried Mrs. Wright, "don't you know your own sister?" and laughed very merrily. On which the unfortunate man, redder than ever, turned about, and evidently in a perfect agony of *mauvaise honte*, suffered himself to be presented to us as Mr. Pugh.

We all took a turn together along the esplanade; and from this time forth we never, by any chance, went out without seeing him,

though frequently without *his* seeing *us*. But whenever he did see us, he always attached himself to us as long as he could, talking very fast and very nervously, as if to convince us that he was quite self-possessed. Marian was involuntarily amused at him, even while she pitied him, but it was the pity akin to contempt, and we both found him such a very common-place companion that we shunned him whenever we could.

At length Saturday came; and, like loving sisters as we were, we tricked out our little lodging with every adornment in our reach, that Jacintha's first impressions might be pleasant. Marian made a pretty white tarletan blind for her window, and filled the little glass in the middle of the pincushion with flowers. She also decorated the parlour chimney-piece with fresh flowers, and persuaded Miss Linnet (who was but too happy to oblige in anything) to

remove some horribly ugly yellow leno from a few framed and glazed engravings on the wall, assuring her that she need fear no danger from the flies. When this was done, we fancied ourselves quite smart, especially as we had dressed in our best; and many were the self-satisfied glances we bestowed on the results of our labours.

Nevertheless, the moment Jacintha looked round her on her arrival, I saw her involuntary thought was, "What a poor little place!" and I felt, that coming from such a large house as our own, it must indeed appear so. Instantly I saw, with *her* eyes, the poor, thin, faded carpet—the shabby couches, the second-rate chairs, the apologies for curtains, the poor little chimney-piece ornaments. It came over me in a flash; but I said nothing, nor did she; for she was in good humour and high spirits, determined to be pleased with everything.

“Well, and so here we are, all together again!” cried she, kissing us affectionately. “How well you both look! As to Marian, she never looked so well in her life! and you, Isabella, have positively a colour, and are growing fat! *I* don’t mean to grow fat, I assure you! I am quite large enough already—I thought sea air always thinned people. I mean to inhale as much of it as I can, and to take prodigious long walks quite beyond your powers of attainment. What joy to have a real holiday! The first, so to speak, that we have had all to ourselves—for Christmas, somehow, was no holiday—we won’t think of it. There was a blight on the house, then; but there is no blight on it now, Isabella! The credit of the school is restored!—its reputation is getting up, as I thought and said it would! What do you think? We have the promise of three new pupils when the school re-opens!”

“Add two to that!” said I, exultingly, and told her of the little De—pshaw! of Mrs. Wright’s little girls.

“Five in all!” cried Marian, rejoicing. “Ten altogether! Oh, what a prospect!”

Jacintha laughed—the happy laugh of well-earned success. “Yes, we have toiled hard,” said she, “and now comes the reward. Isabella, I think we must begin to pay Miss Dixon something now. That good creature deserves more than her keep. Fanny Ward—Oh Marian! I had such reiterated loves to bring you from Fanny Ward! Fanny is in ecstasy—she is going to spend the holidays in the Isle of Wight—she will write to you all about it. So, this is my little room, is it? Well, a very nice little room, I’m sure!—not *quite* so large as the room I have left!—(laughing.) What a good thing I only brought one trunk and bonnet-box! When I have found

a place for everything and put everything in its place, I shall do very well, I dare say. Hawkins desired her duty to you, Isabella. Now, it's off my mind. I must take the good old soul some little remembrance when I return. Dear me, here is a note for you, Marian, from Fanny—I had forgotten she gave me one after all. And notes for you, Isabella, from Flora and Jessy Duncan. And here are book-markers for you both, from Bessy and Clara; and a sachet from Miss Dixon—rather tasteless, poor thing, but she took a world of pains with it. Here are my German books—I mean to go deep into German, this vacation."

Thus ran on Jacintha, with a light heart, while she unpacked, and Marian and I devoured each word with ineffable affection. We seemed to have been so long apart, instead of only three weeks!

"And now, everything is straight," said

Jacintha at last, having arranged her dress a little; "I shall do very well for this evening, as we are not likely to be molested with intruders." And again she laughed gaily.

"Dear me, Jacintha," said Marian, "we have quite a grand visiting-list! Mrs. De Wright; the Miss De Wrights; Mr. Gregory Pugh, Mrs. De Wright's brother; the Reverend Eugenius Carp—"

"Amazing!" cried Jacintha. "Why you must know every visitable person in the place, I should think! And a tiny place it is."

"What fine prawns," she observed, as we gathered round the tea-table. "And such beautiful raspberries; set out with flowers by Marian, I know! I brought the sugar-tongs and butter-knife, at your request, Isabella, but surely Miss Linnet's plate-chest is not deficient in such needful articles?"

Plate-chest indeed! thought I, remembering

with amusement the little basket lined with green-baize which nightly contained worthy Miss Linnet's small complement of spoons, and was carefully carried up by her into her bedroom, for fear of "the rogues."

"What a pity you have not a piano!" said Jacintha, regretfully. "I should so have enjoyed a good practice! We could easily hire one, to be sure; but, after all, I am afraid my voice would be too powerful in this little room—it would go through your head. How do you manage, with only one sitting-room? and that of the smallest! It must be rather inconvenient."

No: we two had not found it so;—but we three did. Jacintha's person was too large for the little room; or the room was too little for her person. She required more space; fancied the atmosphere soon became close; had an irresistible impulse to be always throwing open

the window; (exclaiming "Exit carbon; welcome oxygen!") wanted another table, all to herself; thought there ought to be another sofa. All these dilemmas were noticed in the most good-humoured way; but still, she felt them inconveniences.

Out of doors, her enjoyment was intense. It was delightful to see her inhaling the sea breezes, gazing on the tide coming in, and pacing the firm sands with the dignity of a queen. She enjoyed bathing; she enjoyed going on the sea in a sailing-boat; and she and Marian almost daily partook of this pleasure in company with the sociable Wrights and Mr. Pugh. It was misery to me to go on the sea; I preferred reading, working, and now and then writing to Mary Barnet, at home. Jacintha was immensely diverted at Mr. Pugh, who was for ever walking briskly up to people under the impression that he knew them, and

then saying, "I beg your pardon!" She looked upon him as little better than an idiot; but a well-bred one; and, as such, had no objection to his sauntering beside her on the sands, and sometimes accompanying her and Mrs. Wright on long walks of exploration. Mrs. Wright liked Jacintha uncommonly; and Jacintha liked *being* liked, and being admired, which she plainly was; and Mrs. Wright's lodgings boasted a piano, which ours did not, so Jacintha used to go there sometimes, and play and sing, for her own delectation and that of her company. Marian was not fond of this way of spending the morning, nor very fond of the Wrights. The basis of Jacintha's disposition was sociability; of Marian's, seriousness. Her nerves were not yet quite equal to the loud talking, laughing, and singing at Mrs. Wright's; and one day, they received a yet greater shock during a boating party, when the boat nearly

capzised, and was only saved by the wonderful presence of mind of Mr. Pugh. It was so uncommon a trait in him, that Jacintha was continually recurring to it during the evening ; and she declared that, since she certainly seemed to have influence over him she should impress it on him that he *had* presence of mind, in the hopes that he would apply himself to its cultivation.

But, next day, Jacintha's tone greatly changed. On going to Mrs. Wright's to play, sing, talk, and laugh, as usual, she and Mr. Pugh were left alone together for a few minutes at the piano by Mrs. Wright, who was called out of the room ; and Mr. Pugh, availing himself of the opportunity with incredible promptitude, told Jacintha he thought her the most charming woman in the world, and offered her his hand and heart.

Jacintha was excessively annoyed at it. She

told him she could not think of such a thing, begged she might hear no more of it, and hastily quitted the house. She came home in a great flurry, and told us what an impertinent liberty Mr. Pugh had taken. There were no limits to some people's forwardness and assurance! In vain I endeavoured to compose her; she would not be composed; but fumed and chafed, while Marian went into fits of laughter.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Wright called, and sent in word she would be glad to see me alone. So, of course, Jacintha and Marian were obliged to retire to their bedrooms; which they readily did. Mrs. Wright was very warm in her brother's cause: he was not a man easily pleased, and he was so enthralled by Jacintha, that, short as the intimacy had been, she hoped she would relent in his favour. I assured her the case was hopeless. She begged me to

intercede. I said I knew it would be of no avail. She was a little hurt; but I allayed her wounded feelings; and when we parted, after a lengthened conference, she assured me with the utmost good humour that she liked us all so much that her only regret was that we should not be more nearly connected.

CHAPTER XI.

One pities bashful men, who feel the pain
Of fancied scorn, and undeserved disdain;
And bear the marks, upon a blushing face,
Of needless shame, and self-imposed disgrace.

COWPER.

“**I**F that stupid man has the least sense (which he has not),” cried Jacintha, after an uncomfortable pause, “he will quit the place in twenty-four hours. But, no! he will remain here, you will see, and run up to us half-a-dozen times a day, and then turn as red as scarlet, and say, ‘I beg your pardon!’”

However, she was mistaken, for Mr. Pugh did leave Fishport in a day or two; and as her intimacy with Mrs. Wright had sustained an irreparable shock, she was thrown on her

own resources, and, truth to say, began to find Fishport very flat. In this state of affairs she plunged into German with praiseworthy zeal, and resolved to make a first-rate translation of "Hermann und Dorothea" in English hexameters before the holidays were over. This kept her indoors so much that I told her she was deriving no benefit from local advantages, and prayed her to resume her long walks. Also, when Mr. Carp looked in on us again, I asked him if he understood German, and tried to get up a little fellow-feeling between him and Jacinthia on the subject, though she detected my shallow aim directly, and gave me a mischievous look that said, "To no good, Isabella!" as plainly as a look could speak.

Meanwhile, Marian was making a splendid collection of shells and sea-weeds, and reading all she could about them, in which Mr. Carp

kindly aided her by lending her two or three nice books.

One evening we were all three on the sands, admiring a beautiful sunset, when Jacintha exclaimed with surprise and joy—

“Why, here come John and Laura!”—adding, in rather a mortified undertone, “What will they think of the poking little hole in which they find us?”

John it was, with Laura beside him: a fine-looking young woman, with high colour and piercing black eyes, but, in spite of all the advantages of dress, not nearly so handsome as Jacintha. However, she still was one whom he might present to us with allowable pride, and we all met with great cordiality. It appeared that they were making a tour along the coast, and had resolved to look in on us. Guessing, however, our limited accommodation for visitors, they had bespoken bedroom, dress-

ing-room, and sitting-room at the "Queen's Head," from Saturday till Monday.

It was a very pleasant meeting. Marian, at a hint from me, flew to give Miss Linnet notice of the addition to our tea-party, and then returned to the beach, where the tide was coming in beautifully, sparkling in the sun at the roll of each long wave. John beheld it with delight; he called it the finest sea he had ever seen, though Laura inveighed at his forgetfulness of the Channel Islands. We walked all in a row, as people *do* walk sometimes on a fine wide reach of sand; I between John and Laura; Jacintha at Laura's other side, and Marian next to John. The improvement in Marian's looks was delightful to him; he commented on it openly, and also took the opportunity of whispering to me aside that he had never seen Jacintha look more glowing with health and animation.

We did not go in-doors till dusk, and then the small lodgings certainly did feel warm and close; but John placed himself at the open window, never satiated, apparently, with the sea; and quoted poetry to me, while Jacintha and Laura enjoyed a tête-à-tête, and Marian busied herself at the tea-table.

The next day we all went to church together twice; but they breakfasted and dined at their inn; drinking tea and supping with us. A boating excursion, comprising all but myself, occupied nearly the whole of the next day: they came home tired, hungry, and merry; and Jacintha rejoicingly told me that she had accepted the kind invitation of John and Laura to accompany them on the remainder of their tour.

I was unfeignedly pleased at this, for I well knew she was tired of Fishport, though she was too good humoured to say so; and I

wished her to have a holiday not only in name but in reality.

On Tuesday, then, they all departed, leaving Marian and me once more to take care of one another. And though I had heartily enjoyed their society while it lasted, I must say also I heartily enjoyed the succeeding quiet; for I was never very strong.

Marian's case, however, was different: she was a great many years younger than myself, and on her account I wished that John's invitation had included her. But she assured me she had not wished it, and that quiet was really as acceptable to her as it could be to myself. We returned contentedly, therefore, to our habitual pursuits. Jacintha's short stay with us had manifestly improved Marian's spirits, and she was now as gay and well as ever.

We now stood on the highest pinnacle of

Miss Linnet's good opinion. Marian and I had been esteemed all that could be wished; but Jacintha was superb, magnificent, queen-like; and John was such a fine man, and Mrs. Middlemass so charming—"Oh, my dear madam!"—a flourish of the hands expressed the rest.

I had taken an opportunity of anxiously inquiring of John whether he had heard any tidings of my father, or knew where he was. But he replied, with indifference, "No—the old gentleman has taken his own course, and pays his children the compliment of pursuing it out of their sight. He is following his own pleasure, I suppose, and leaves them to theirs."

The day after they left us, however, Jacintha wrote me a hurried line from an inn, to say John had desired her to cut out the inclosed small passage from a newspaper and forward it to me: adding, "It seems to have

been a more respectable connexion than we had supposed. However, I cannot bear to think about it."

The announcement was this:—"At Tours, on the 20th ultimo, Susan, wife of Godfrey Middlemass, Esq., late of Mincing Lane, in the thirty-second year of her age."

"Then they were married, after all!" exclaimed Marian. "Oh, how thankful I am!" And tears rolled down her cheeks.

I shed tears too. "We did him injustice in one thing, at any rate," said I. "But one cannot be sorry for her death, for she was a very disreputable companion for him." In fact, she had been our—cook!

"He will feel very lonely now," said Marian. "I wonder whether he will come back."

"Oh, no! He cannot. He dares not. He cannot answer his liabilities."

"Should you like him to return?"

“ I should like it, and yet dread it. He has an immortal soul.”

“ And who will care for it if his own daughters do not? How kind he used to be to us when we were children! How he once loved mamma! Don’t you remember how he cried at her funeral? His heart must be softened now. Dear Isabella, don’t you think you might write him one of your nice letters? ”

“ Yes, I think I might write, now we know where he is. Perhaps his having the announcement inserted was in order that we might do so.”

“ And John will not, I am sure. So *do* write! And let me put in a little postscript.”

I wrote, and she added the postscript. It was late when the letter was finished; at least, too late for the evening post, which went out at seven. We were talking the subject over,

seriously and sadly, when we heard a brisk knock at the door. Marian changed colour, and my heart beat violently.

“Can it be he?” said she. “Yet, no. Hearken!”

We listened intently. Miss Linnet opened the house-door.

“Dear sir!” we heard her say, “is it you? I am sure I am very glad to see you.”

Something was answered indistinctly in a man’s voice, to which she returned—

“Oh, no, sir, not at all! I am sure they will be happy to see you. Pray walk in!”

“Mr. Duncan!” said Marian, softly, with a quick look at me, and flushing brightly.

Mr. Duncan it was. In he came, looking but half-assured of being welcome, in spite of the officious smiles of Miss Linnet, as she ushered him in.

“Mr. Duncan, ladies—though I’m sure I

need not have announced him, for you must have heard his voice in the hall" (passage, she might have called it). "Tea shall be served directly," and she hastened out.

"Why, you quite surprise me!" said I, smiling, and extending my hand.

"I almost surprise myself," said he, laughing with embarrassment. "It seems so odd to be here again. I hardly knew how you would take it. Not amiss, I hope?" with a deprecating look towards Marian.

"How can we?" said Marian, simply.

"How, indeed!" rejoined I. "For my part, I am very glad to see you. And where is your lively friend?"

"In my cottage, near a wood," replied Mr. Duncan, taking up the old tone with alacrity. "Fact, I assure you. I *have* a cottage at the viaduct, built on the tea-caddy plan. Parallelogram outside, two compartments within—

for bed and board. Meals sent from the railway-hotel, over the way. Barley-wood in the distance. So there he is, Jack in the box, and this time, I'm the Shadowless Man."

"Instead of 'the dog and his shadow,'" said I, laughing at the old joke. "How came two such inseparables to find they can exist apart?"

"Abstruse study, Miss Middlemass, has for a time divided the shadow from the dog: no idle dog, I promise you. Jack is constructing an improved dynamometer; but Jack talks too much unless he is solus, and so he frankly gave me a hint he would rather be monarch of all he surveyed till the achievement was completed; and, as I was hammering at the quicksand difficulty, and wanted to be on the sea-shore, I bade him adieu for awhile, promising hereafter to meet him by moonlight

alone—pshaw ! meet him at Philippi. This is one of the mischiefs of a couple of schoolboys keeping together after they are schoolboys no longer. They keep on fooling each other to the top of their bent, leap-frogging through daily life, till all the world believes them to be schoolboys still. So that I really am glad to be away from Jack for awhile, to show you, Miss Middlemass, how rational I can be when left to myself.”

“Take care you do not make us regret Mr. Jekyl every time we see you,” said Marian, alertly. “That may be the case, if quicksands and dynamometers are your only subjects.”

“Then I can resume the old style as easily as put on my hat,” said Mr. Duncan. “I know it is not polite to talk of business before ladies ; only, I think it a compliment to them, too, not to confine one’s talk to mere chat when really interesting matters are in hand.”

“Certainly,” said I, “and I wonder at Marian’s want of sense in seeming to think otherwise, for I know she does not do so in reality. I can only say, that *I* shall think all the better of you for being seriously engaged in your professional studies.”

“Instead of tying crabs on to young ladies’ back hair. Oh, Miss Middlemass, how that has weighed on my conscience. I—I, was the culprit! Alone I did it! Jack, like a Py-lades as he is, would not betray me (though he continually threatened to do so—kept me in perfect thralldom about it). And I, like a coward as I was, thought you would never speak to me again if I owned it—and that was a punishment I could not face. So I slunk about like a cat that has stolen cream, but, oh! my dreams were haunted! *Say* you forgive me!” cried he, suddenly dropping on one knee before Marian.

“Certainly, certainly,” said she, turning very red, and looking scandalized; “pray get up, and say no more about it.”

“Get up! I thought you would at least say ‘arise,’” observed he, resuming his seat, just as the maid opened the door, revealing an indistinct view of Miss Linnet in the background, her eyes twinkling with delight at the romantic attitude. That considerate lady chose to ignore our having had tea already, and sent in tea for three—in the best china. There were muffins, too, which we certainly did not owe to the Honourable Mrs. Hum-budgeon.

“How long,” said I, by way of giving the conversation an improving turn (especially in the hearing of Miss Linnet), “how long do you expect this quicksand inquiry to last?”

Instead of answering my stupid question, he stirred his tea very sapiently, and then said

to me, "A person counting some guineas, being asked how many he had, replied, 'If you had as many, and as many more, and half as many, and one quarter as many, you would have two hundred and sixty-four.' How many had the person who was counting his gold?"

"Who on earth can answer such a question?" cried I.

"Why, it's the very first example in the rule of Position!" cried Mr. Duncan. "Oh, Miss Middlemass, and do *you* profess to teach the young idea how to shoot?"

"I never learnt the rule," said I, hardily.

"No," said Marian, laughing, "Isabella is a shocking accountant—" and she made merry at my expense by relating my blunder at Christmas.

"It was enough to break your sisters' hearts!" said he to me. "What! All that labour and no reward?"

“Ah, there is always a reward in doing our duty,” said I.

“Which you clearly were not doing, in making that blunder. No, I look upon it as a very grievous affair. Your sisters ought to have put you back into simple addition, and carried you through all the rules. I am afraid arithmetic is a sadly neglected branch of ladies’ education.”

“Marian has been through Euclid,” said I.

“How far?” said he.

“Past the dunce’s bridge,” said Marian.

“And she used to put W. N. C. D. at the end of the demonstrations instead of Q. E. D.,” said I.

“Wherefore?” inquired Mr. Duncan.

“Oh, that was stupid—and rather conceited too,” said Marian, looking rather ashamed. “It stood for ‘Which nobody can deny.’ I should not do so *now*.”

“Because you are wiser *now*, and more humble *now*. Well, I dare say you are both. Wisdom and humility generally go together. There have been women, you know, who have filled professorial chairs.”

“Yes; Lucia de Medrano, at Salamanca; and Francesca de Lebrija, at Alcalá.”

“Did you never hear of the *blue nun*, Maria Gaetana Agnesi?”

“No.”

“Well, I chanced to meet with a curious account of her lately. She lived about a hundred years ago, and was one of those remarkable instances which perhaps Italy has supplied more than any other country, of profound acquirements combined with honest humility.”

“Those whom I mentioned were Spanish.”

“True. But this young lady lived at Milan. President de Brosses was passing through that

city, when he was invited to a conversazione for the express purpose of witnessing her extraordinary accomplishments. She was accompanied by her little sister, and surrounded by a circle of about thirty persons. She discussed with them in Latin the causes of the tides, then on the brain, then spoke on optics, on the transparency of bodies, and on curvilinear figures in geometry."

"Dear me," said I, "she must have been much too learned to be agreeable!"

"Well, she feared so herself. After conversing with every foreigner in his own language, she turned to De Brosse, and observed that if the conversation had interested one or two, it had probably tired twenty."

"Academical disquisitions of that kind rarely result in practical good, I should think," said Marian.

"She wrote a treatise on geometry, however,

which is not more remarkable for its profundity than for the interesting manner in which it is written. The venerable Colson learnt Italian for the sole purpose of reading it."

"And why," said I, "did you call this wonderful young lady a blue nun?"

"She had a very affectionate, sensitive heart; and the death of her father so afflicted her that she forsook the world, entered a community of blue nuns, and turned all her thoughts to heaven."

"A true woman's end," said I. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

"Do you admire learned ladies?" inquired Marian, timidly.

"Yes, when their dresses are long enough to hide their blue stockings. They may peep out, now and then, like Mrs. Opie's white satin shoes."

"A woman's mission," said I, "is to be a

helper. Nothing can be amiss in her that enables her to appreciate what a sensible man says, and aid him in what he does. Above all, she must wage continual warfare with sin—because, by her, sin entered into the world.”

“*How* wage warfare?”

“By inculcating goodness on the young, the ignorant, and the misled.”

“True.—You and your sisters are doing this.”

“We are trying to do it.”

“Yours is a high mission,” said he, after a short pause. “I wish some would think it so who do not.”

I longed to know to whom he referred; but he began to talk to Marian of *Echinæ marinæ*.

He left us in very good time; by which I mean early. As soon as he was gone, Marian opened her little writing-case, and began to write very fast: sometimes pausing to think,

with her hand shading her eyes. I said to her, idly—

“Would you like this review? I have finished it.”

“No, thank you,” she replied, “I am putting down one or two noteworthy things Mr. Duncan said.” And went on writing till bedtime.

It is almost needless to say, that from this evening the intimacy rapidly increased, or that not a day passed without our spending a great portion of it together. I really believe that Mr. Duncan did not deceive us in saying that he was “hammering at the quicksand difficulty”—he was too truthful for that; but I believe that it gradually, nay, very soon, became secondary, and at length absorbed in his far greater interest in Marian. I watched the progress of his increasing attachment with anxiety. I knew his connexions and position

to be excellent ; his education and disposition, his character and principles appeared everything that could be wished ; should I be justified, therefore, in placing unnecessary obstacles to the improvement of an acquaintance with each other's minds which might colour their whole subsequent lives ? I asked Jacintha ; she replied, certainly not : and I was very thankful to be absolved by her from the burthen of making myself disagreeable. Only, doubts and misgivings would arise — “whither does it tend ? and how will it end ?” — which I could not answer.

CHAPTER XII.

What if thy heaven be overcast?
The dark appearance will not last;
Expect a brighter sky!
The god that strings the silver bow,
Awakes sometimes the muses too,
And lays his arrows by.

HORACE : *trans. by Cowper.*

ONE morning, we were all three seated on our favourite rock, which Mr. Duncan had dubbed, I know not why, "the rock of reflection," when Marian suddenly said—

"Pray remain here, both of you, while I go to speak to John Frost. I sadly fear he has been saying what is untrue."

And she walked quickly towards him, while yet he was at some distance.

“ ‘Light as fairy-foot can fall,’ ” muttered Mr. Duncan. A minute afterwards he said, in quite an altered tone, “I am so thankful she is gone !”

I looked round at him in surprise, and saw that he was quite pale.

“Now or never !” exclaimed he ; and his colour returned deeply. “I can never see either of you alone, and in a few days I shall see neither of you in any way. Oh, Miss Middlemass, be now and always my friend !”

“Be assured of it,” said I, cordially : “I was very stupid ever to doubt you, and you have now thoroughly secured my esteem.”

“What blessed words !” cried he, grasping my hand. “But you know not how I may test it.”

I replied, “Esteem that will not bear test, is unworthy of the name. You are young, and may not always be wise ; but that will not

forfeit mine, so long as you are honest and true."

"And that I am and ever will be—God being my helper!" said he, fervently. "But my way is hedged about with thorns—will you assist me?"

"Certainly, if I can," said I. "It is often a good though a painful thing to have our path hedged in with thorns, because then we have no temptation to swerve right or left, however rugged our footing. Do you not remember that our great adversary's complaint to the Almighty was that He had hedged Job about, so that there was no getting at him to assail him?"

"True—I did not think of that; but the cases, alas, are not similar, because I am within the reach of assault."

"Then triumph over it, by all means, like a brave man; as Job did, when his hedge was

removed. We are apt to dwell on his patience (which was what most of us would call very imperfect, after all) to the exclusion of his active virtues—his noble warfare against sin.”

“ Well, I am afraid there is little analogy between us. But, enough for me that you bear with me and sympathize with me—if you can. Oh, Miss Middlemass, *what* will you say, when I tell you that I love your sister to distraction? ”

“ I shall say that young men often say such things, believing in them very sincerely, though I think the expression a foolish one. You mean that you like—nay, love Marian very much. Well, Mr. Duncan, I, for one, believe that she cannot be liked or loved too much,—by those properly under her influence.”

“ You mean me to infer, gently and kindly as you speak, that I do not legitimately come within the pale of that influence. Well, Miss

Middlemass, here is my difficulty—supposing me simply as a disengaged man, ‘honest and true,’ sufficiently well-born and well-connected, with a small independent property and a profession I love and am making my way in, which may eventually make me rich,—I say, considering all these things, I suppose I might, without undue presumption, offer myself, under fitting circumstances, as a candidate for your sister’s favour? ”

“ I think you might—at least, I see no reason—”

“ Why I should not? Oh, there is only one—my father”— He stopped, with a look of grief.

“ Your father would not consent? ” said I, with a sudden pang.

“ I fear so—I am almost certain his prejudices are so strong! ”—

“ Against governesses and schoolmistresses,

you mean," said I, with a deep sense of wounded pride. And then my father's defalcations rushed to mind, and I felt that ours was *not* an unsullied name.

He was painfully silent. At length he faltered, "What can be done?"

"Nothing can be done," replied I, decisively, "but to do no more harm. Though *you* have in so short a time, received so deep an impression, it does not therefore follow that you have made one; and you therefore owe it to my sister not to endanger her peace by prolonging an intimacy which can be attended with no good. If you do otherwise, you will be exceedingly selfish."

"Oh, Miss Middlemass, what cutting words!"

"Forgive me, forgive me," said I, with remorse. "It distresses me to pain you, but my sister is naturally first in my thoughts, and I cannot, cannot see her happiness threatened."

“Certainly not—least of all by me; and yet, how *can* I give her up?”

“She would never hear you on the subject, if she thought it were in opposition to your father’s wishes. *We*, alas, have a father, and you know not her strong sense of duty to him.”

“I know—I understand—I believe—Well, but will you let me speak to her on the subject?”

“Mr. Duncan, how *can* you?—I had hoped better things. Would you make yourself less unhappy by making her more so?”

“Perhaps it might not—Who knows?”

“‘Who knows,’ you may certainly say; but I do hope her maiden meditations are yet fancy-free, and the dictates of affection, even of good policy, are in this case the same with those of mere justice. I know nothing of your father—you know a great deal; and should you be able to overcome his objections, address my sister openly, and no one will rejoice more

than I shall at your success. But on other terms, it cannot, must not be."

"Oh, how pleasantly this conversation opened, and how painfully it concludes!"

"Do not believe yourself the only one pained by it!" And he must have seen that my eyes were full of tears.

"What *can* I do?"

"That need never be a question with any of us. We can always do our duty, and leave the event with God. And, when He sees we do so *unreservedly*, He often clears away difficulties in a way we had neither asked nor thought."

We were speaking so earnestly that it startled us to see Marian standing before us, with wondering eyes.

"You are talking seriously on something," said she, simply; "I will go away."

"No, you need not," said I, trying to rise: but my heart beat so violently that I was

obliged to sit still for a few minutes. She sat down beside me. Mr. Duncan, who was on my other side, pulled a *Times* newspaper from his pocket, and spread it out, and tried to appear to read it, but I saw a tear fall on the paper.

“Hallo!” said he, presently, with forced interest, “here’s something requires attending to. ‘To colleges and gentlemen mechanics. A bargain under peculiar circumstances. A very first-rate hand foot-lathe, by Collier, of Manchester, eight-foot planed bed, eight inch double-gear’d headstocks, compound slide-rest, boring collar, fourteen inch three-jawed chuck, and set of drills and tools—all quite new. Just cost seventy pounds, to be sold for fifty pounds. To be seen at Candler’s Warehouse, Billiter Street, City.’ I must write to my father about this directly; he wants one for my brother Dick.” And, starting up and shaking hands with us with

far more fervour than the occasion seemed to require, he hurried off.

“How strange!” cried Marian, looking after him in surprise, “he looked as grave as if some great misfortune had happened; and the post is not going out yet. Can you understand it, Isabella?”

“He has been talking of something unpleasant,” said I, after a little pause.

“I feared so,” said Marian: “I saw it in your countenances as I came up. You were giving him kind advice, I know.”

A tear started into my eye as I answered—

“I hope so—I meant it as such.”

“Might I ask,” said she, hesitating, “what it was?”

I replied, “Better not.”

“Well,” she sweetly said, “I can trust you. Mr. Duncan may have confidences to repose in you, who are so much older, that he could

not trust to me. I am sure he appreciates you, and that he could not have a wiser, kinder adviser."

"Ah," I said, "I am not sure of that! You will, at any rate, be glad to know that he is only perplexed and troubled—he has not done any wrong."

"That is a great comfort," said she, with a deep sigh. "As long as people do not do wrong, all is sure to come right at last."

"So I told him," said I.

"And so I told John Frost," said Marian. "Do you know, I fear he has really been passing off his own handiworks for mine to Mr. Duncan and Mr. Jekyl, and getting a great deal of money from them. It was silly of them to be so deceived, and wrong to pay him so much. However, as he is very sorry and ashamed—at least he seems so—and has promised not to do so again, I have for-

given him, and promised to make one or two more sand-drawings for him in the afternoon, on condition of his always putting his name on his own."

"Ay, that will be a good plan," said I, glad she had something that would occupy her for a few hours. "I shall tell Mr. Duncan," pursued she, as we walked homewards, "that I have found out how he has been raising the market. Yet, no, I will not."

It was a good thing she so decided, for she had not the opportunity afforded her of doing otherwise. Soon after our early dinner, a note from Mr. Duncan was put into my hand. It ran thus :—

"DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,

"I am off to London about this lathe. I fancy close inspection is necessary before I can rely on its satisfying my father. Should

you and Miss Marian have left Fishport ere I return to it, I can only say that my loss will be much greater than words can easily express. Meanwhile, with my best compliments to her, and excuses for so hastily running away, believe me,

“Faithfully yours,

“FRANCIS DUNCAN.”

How I thanked him in my heart for such commonplace! Nothing could be simpler than to pass it on to Marian, whom it quite satisfied, though she looked much grieved.

“I wonder,” said she, after a pause, “whether he *will* return before we go. Only three days left! But surely this affair of the lathe need not take him more than twenty-four hours.”

“If he finds it necessary to see his father about it,” said I, “he will hardly be back in three days.”

“I am no judge of the importance of the matter, but if he does find it necessary to do so, it strikes me that he must be very anxious to please his father.”

“He *is* very anxious to please his father.”

“A good son must be likely to be good in all other respects, I think,” said Marian, wistfully.

“There can be no better presumptive evidence of goodness.”

This seemed to please her, and she set about her sand-drawings very diligently, but had not made much progress when Mr. Carp brought his sister to call on us.

They were pleasant, friendly people, though they seemed rather flat after Mr. Duncan. They asked us to drink tea with them, which I accepted with alacrity, without referring to Marian; for somehow I shrank from a *tête-à-tête* with her, and from solitude: I could not

get that frank-hearted young man's sad face out of my memory. The Carps were only a few doors off, so that it was the easiest thing in the world to step in to them, and to step home again. Like ourselves, they were in lodgings; but, unlike ourselves, they were likely to occupy them permanently, and therefore they had collected many little home-comforts and elegancies about them—a piano, a davenport, a globe of gold fish, flower-stands, book-stands, &c.

Miss Carp asked Marian to play and sing; and when Marian asked *her*, she played “Robin Adair.” Marian could not resist giving me a comic look; but I believe we were both, in our hearts, more ready to cry than laugh. It seemed as if suggestive ballads were to be the order of the night; for the brother and sister afterwards sang the old air of “Jess Macfarlane.”

“ When first she came to town,
We called her Jess Macfarlane,
But now she’s come and gone,
We call her ‘ wandering darling ! ’
O this love, this love !
Of this love I ’m weary,
Sleep I can get none
For thinking of my deary ! ”

Sleep I could get none that night for the tune running in my head. And, as I could not sleep, I lay thinking of all sorts of uncomfortable things : wondering whether I had done wrong ; wondering how much Marian cared about Mr. Duncan ; wondering whether he would broach the subject to his father—would ever obtain his consent—would write to either of us—would succeed in forgetting Marian, &c. &c.

The next morning we were not cheerful. That was no reason, however, Marian thought, for neglecting kindnesses ; so she finished

crocheting a pair of watch-pockets for Miss Linnet, and a collar for her sister, and mounted her sand-drawings, and carried them with her when we went down to the beach. John Frost limping up very fast towards us, and grinning uncouthly, like a poor half-witted fellow as he was, said, pointing to the "rock of reflection," "That 'ere gemman cut your tombstone afore he left, only he's spelled your name wrong, I knows."

Marian looked at him in wonder, without asking any questions; nor did she hurry herself in what she was telling him about the prices he must ask. John Frost was hastily limping in advance to show her her epitaph, or whatever it might prove, but, much to his mortification, she said, "No, John, no; you may go—we do not want you now," and saw him depart.

Then we went, with curiosity sufficiently

alert, to our favourite rock-seat ; and thereon found neatly engraven :—

“ IN MEMORIAM.”

We could not help being affected. For a time we sat side by side in silence ; but a fellow-feeling drew our hearts together, and presently we began to talk with undisguised regret of our lost companion, and to dwell on his numerous good traits. It was evidently a relief to Marian, and therefore I encouraged and prolonged it, till really there was no more to say.

When we arose, and looked once more at the inscription—

“ Poor Jack Frost ! ” said she, “ he evidently misread it, ‘ I’m Marian,’ and thought ‘ the gentleman ’ did not know how to spell ! ”

And, trying to laugh, she had great difficulty to help crying.

I thought to myself, "Lord Duncan beat the Dutch on the 11th of October; but Francis Duncan, I have reason to hope, conquered himself on the 27th of August; and, as 'he that ruleth himself is greater than he that taketh a city,' *that* will hereafter be to me the date of 'Duncan's victory!'"

I thought, "What a narrow-minded, proud, cold-hearted, arbitrary curmudgeon old Mr. Duncan must be, to make his son feel he would refuse his consent to marrying an amiable girl whose position is not quite equal to his own!" And then I remembered our own feelings respecting my father's lowering marriage. But the cases were not parallel. Still it was a stigma that, in the eye of the world, rested on his children.

The day was a saddening one to me, and of anxious expectation to Marian. No one came. I felt sure that nobody *would* come.

I felt sure that Duncan's victory was won by a *coup-de-main*, and I honoured him for it. I knew that Marian was pained; but I knew she must have been pained at any rate, and I thought I had saved her a world of agitation and sorrow.

The next day we packed up and returned home. To the last, Marian was in hopes Mr. Duncan would return, and a tear shone in her eye more than once, but she bore her trial without being peevish or perverse, as some girls would have been. She was sweet-tempered throughout the day; spared me every little trouble and fatigue in her power; had a farewell word and gift for John Frost, many kindnesses for the Misses Linnet, and a pretty present for their awkward little maid.

Of course Miss Linnet was full of regrets to the last: in fact, she shed tears that I believe were of sincere feeling, and her only

consolation was in hoping that we might revisit her the following year. "For the clime is evidently congenial to your constitutions," said she; "and though I am past the meridian of life, I would fain hope that I may yet be spared a few fleeting years to enjoy the amenities of social intercourse. The day will come," continued she, as we stood on her threshold, quite ready for the last word, "the day will come, my dear madam,—and, at no distant period,—when" (here she lowered her voice for me alone to hear) "you will be bereft of your charming young companion. It is impossible not to foresee that she will soon or late be enrolled among the votaries of Hymen. And when that epoch shall arrive, and the happy pair shall resort to some congenial spot, for that period fancifully called the honeymoon, how favoured should I esteem myself were Fishport the spot selected. Suf-

fice it to say, that no inmates would be more welcome at No. 12."

"Thank you, thank you," said I; "and now, once more, good-bye!"

"Be sure to remember my respectful compliments to Miss Jacintha."

"I promise not to forget."

"And should *she*, my dear madam, be the first to lead the way to the altar we were speaking of, be assured I would, with equal pleasure, hail the advent of Miss Jacintha."

"I will tell her so," replied I, unable to help laughing; and we nodded and smiled at one another to the last.

CHAPTER XIII.

Our portion is not large, indeed,
But then, how little do we need !
For nature's calls are few ;
In this the art of living lies,
To want no more than may suffice,
And make that little do.

COTTON.

JACINTHA, bright with smiles, was already at home to receive us ; and we found everything in such perfect preparation for the re-opening, that there was nothing for us to do but to sit down to our late dinner, and talk over all we had to say, during and after it.

We had little enough to tell, but Jacintha had abundance, and all of a cheerful complexion ; so that it suited Marian and me right

well to listen to her flowing details, which we only interspersed with occasional remarks.

Marian was tired, and went to bed early; and then Jacintha and I had a confidential conference. I told her of what had taken place between Mr. Duncan and me; painting his perplexity and distress in very vivid colours, but yet rather pluming myself on the dispassionate way in which I had behaved, and the strength of mind with which I had discouraged his addresses.

What was my mortification to find that Jacintha thought I had done quite wrong!—that I had been far too fond of intervention from first to last;—that every man had a right to speak for himself;—and that I had injured Marian in not allowing him to let her hear his sentence from her own lips! We had each a great deal to say upon it: I defended myself,

and Jacintha attacked me very warmly ; but when, in a fit of desperation, I said, “ Well then, shall I tell her *now* ? ” she unhesitatingly said, “ Certainly not ! It is now too late. You could give her nothing but pain.” So I wished her good night, and went to bed ; thinking she had had more experience in affairs of the heart than I had, though neither had much.

My sisters did not leave their rooms till late the next morning, which gave me the opportunity of revolving the contents of a letter that arrived by the early post while I was yet in bed. I knew the hand at once for Mr. Frank Duncan’s, and I opened and read as follows :—

“ Pendynas House, Aug. 29.

“ MY DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,

“ Shall you be glad, sorry, or unconcerned to hear that the lathe suited my father’s purpose exactly, and has made my brother Richard

the happiest of mortals? Meantime, *I*, the author of his bliss, or, at any rate, an important agent in it, am very unhappy, and do not see any immediate hope of being otherwise. What is the good of humming

‘O no ! we never mention her,
Her name is never heard,’

when I am thinking of her every hour in the twenty-four? You will say, ‘why not speak out, then, now that your father is pleased about the lathe?’ Oh, that would go for nothing ! So trifling a service, I am constrained to own, did not entitle me to ask for such an enormous return. No—I must bide my time, as the saying is ; but I do think that I could have bided it much more comfortably, nay, heroically, had you, my *well-meaning* friend ! permitted something like a conditional engagement to be made between your sister and me. True, she

might not have consented—but then, but then ! I should have heard it from her own dear lips. She might have rejected me with scorn—but I don't think it ! I mean to say, that, had she rejected me, it would have been with kindness ;—perhaps even with tears, and they would have been such balm to my heart !

“ Well ! it can't be helped. You meant all for the best, my dear, good friend, I am sure ; and perhaps all *is* for the best ;—only I can't see it ! You will think me an impertinent fellow for daring to write to you ; but it is only for this once, and you owe me a little reparation for having interposed a wall of ice between me and my beloved.

“ Really, when I count over the days I have spent in her company (I have made a little calendar of them), it *does* seem sufficiently impudent to suppose she can care one straw for me ! However, Jack Jekyl, who is a com-

plete Jack Straw, as easily set in a blaze as a man of straw would be, believes in love at first sight (on the gentleman's side), and I believe he is in the right on't!

“ Now then, for

‘ Folded hands, downcast eyes,
A sigh, that, piercing, mortifies,—’

or rather, hurra for civil engineering! I'll do something grand! I'll clean the Thames! I'll make a steam balloon! You'll hear of me somehow and somewhere. Love's labour lost.

“ My dear kind friend, I have not forgotten your saying to me, ‘ You have thoroughly secured my esteem—and esteem that will not bear testing is unworthy the name.’ You said I should not forfeit yours, as long as I was honest and true. I *will* be honest and true. And now, farewell. Burn this as soon as read,

and say nothing to anybody. Your confidants are not mine, and I am a little afraid of Miss Jacintha ! Therefore, burn and destroy !

“ Faithfully yours,

“ FRANCIS DUNCAN.”

“ Did you see that capital hit in *Punch* ? Two young fellows on the beach, gazing at a rock. *First Party* (who is hard hit, and sentimental) : ‘ This is the very spot where I last saw her ! I assure you, Frank, she is the loveliest, the most beautiful, the-the-the—’ *Second Party* (who has heard the same thing for the last two hours) : ‘ Hum,—ha !—Dare say !—Yes !’ No, no, I hope I don’t look quite such a goose.

“ I can’t daub it any longer.”

Faithful to his desire, I destroyed the letter, and commenced my usual routine, but in a

sadder guise than usual. However, it was too busy a day for sadness : one pupil after another duly arrived ; and, by bed-time, the house was full.

Marian was fully alive to the triumph of having regained our complement of pupils. Nay, we had even more candidates than we could receive, and felt our self-complacence much augmented thereby. Miss Dixon was elated by it too, especially as she was now to have a salary. A dancing mistress and drawing master were engaged ; and we recommenced our task under the most encouraging auspices.

It may have been fancy—but Marian seemed to me an older, more matured, more serious character than heretofore. She had been a girl among girls ; she was their playfellow no longer, though she loved to see *them* play, and never tired of encouraging them to recreation as the reward of diligence. She often smiled, but

rarely laughed. I could not help feeling the difference.

Fanny Ward, her shadow, must needs grow more serious too; however, her heart was light enough; there was nothing but satisfaction with her to be expressed.

One evening—(and here I may as well say, that whereas we had at first plumed ourselves on having things vastly superior to schools in general, we now pretty much followed the common rules and customs observed by other establishments. How often we draw our plans on a larger, more liberal scale than we are able to fill up!)—One evening, then, while we were enjoying our *tête-à-tête* hour after the girls were gone to bed, and the fatigues of the day were ended, Jacintha, who was reading *The Times*, suddenly exclaimed—“What is the name of your Mr. Duncan’s colliery? Pendynas Bank? There has been an awful occurrence!”

“ Oh ! ” cried Marian and I, simultaneously, in tones of dismay. I added, “ Quick ! tell us all about it ! ”

“ Last Wednesday,” read Jacintha, “ the men employed in the extensive colliery works of Mr. Duncan, of Pendynas, were proceeding to their posts at the usual hour, which is six o’clock, when a man came hastily from the pit, stating that the whole place was full of sulphur, and that all the men below were unquestionably killed. This dreadful intelligence spread rapidly through the neighbourhood, and in about half an hour, between two and three hundred women, chiefly wives and mothers, assembled together at the mouth of the pit, in the most agonizing suspense as to the fate of their husbands and sons. Long before this, however, and within a very short time after the accident, Mr. Francis Duncan, the second son of the respected proprietor,

came running from Pendynas House, crying, 'Who will follow me?' As the young gentleman is greatly and deservedly beloved, several of the best pitmen immediately stepped forward and volunteered to follow him till death; on which he chose out six, and descended with them into the pit as soon as the foul air had sufficiently cleared off. In a few minutes, through their arduous exertions, the senseless bodies of fourteen workmen were brought up and laid side by side at the pit's mouth. The agony of the wives and mothers of the unfortunate men may be conceived, but quite baffles description. The deaths had not been caused by any explosion, but by the fatal choke-damp; and the countenances of the victims were undisfigured by the expression of suffering, and appeared as if in peaceful sleep. The origin of this dreadful calamity is at present uncertain, but an inspection of

the pit by practical men will doubtless immediately take place."

Tears rolled down my cheeks, while Marian fairly laid her head on her arms, and wept.

"What a spirited young man he must be!" exclaimed Jacintha. "There is no mention of his coming up again."

"I was always sure there was good in him," said Marian, drying her eyes: at which Jacintha and I exchanged glances. "But those poor people—" and she wept afresh.

"They do not appear to have had much suffering," said I.

"What, not the wives and the mothers?" cried Marian. "I was thinking of *them*!"

"True—they are the most to be pitied—as far as we know."

"I suppose," said Jacintha, "old Mr. Duncan is a wealthy, liberal man, who will provide handsomely for them all."

“Wealthy he undoubtedly is,” said I, “but I question his being liberal. Indeed I suspect him to be the reverse.”

“Oh, Isabella! what *can* you be thinking of?” cried Marian, aggrieved.

“Why, what do *you* know of him?” said Jacintha, quickly.

“A great deal. Mr. Francis Duncan continually spoke to me of his father. He said he loved him very much, though he certainly held him in awe; and that his father grudged nothing that could benefit or aggrandize his children.”

“Ah, ‘aggrandize!’”—echoed I.

“Yes, I did not like the word, any more than you do, but it was his own. At any rate it showed that his father had what he believed his children’s best interests at heart. Isabella heard none of this, nor of a great deal that was worth hearing,” added Marian,

with a little malice, "because she was always talking and laughing with Mr. Jekyl."

Was there ever such an accusation! *I*, the steadiest of the steady! Really, the best of people do not know what they may be accused of! Not that I mean to call myself one of the best;—far from it.

When a kind friend habitually lends one a newspaper, but now and then intermits it, there is pretty sure to be something in the missing number that one would have liked to see. Thus, on the present occasion, we were all anxious to see the account of the catastrophe, which evidently was hastily written and incomplete, carried on in the report of the next day; and yet that was the first morning since the holidays that *The Times* did not reach us. After waiting for it throughout the day, I thought I would call on Mrs. Meade, to whose kindness we owed it, instead

of sending a message. It was getting towards dusk before I was able to start, and as the walk was, for me, a long one, I took some time about it, and at length reached her house very tired. She was talking earnestly to a gentleman as I entered, and named him to me, but I did not catch the name in the little bustle of our meeting; observing only that he held the missing *Times* in his hand. After a few preliminary observations, I said—

“What an awful accident there has been at Pendynas! Is there any second account?”

“We were just discussing it as you entered,” said Mrs. Meade. “I dare say you would like to hear it—” and her companion, immediately turning to the paragraph, read as follows:—

“An inquest was held yesterday at the Queen’s Head tavern, near the Pendynas colliery works, on the bodies of the unfortunate

men who met with sudden and fearful death yesterday in the pit. George Elliott, one of the deputy-overmen, stated that the pit was in good condition when they went down to work. He was coming out of the north headway towards the west drift, when a lad shouted to him to get the men out, as there was a rush of foul air. He called aloud to them, and, at the same time, ran towards the shaft, but met men coming from it, saying, they could not get to it on account of the smoke. Presently something fell from above, and made all dark. A long time passed; he and the men could hardly breathe—one of them said, ‘there is but a step between us and death;’ and began to pray. Presently another said, ‘hush!’ and they heard some one on the other side of the separation-wall say, ‘where are their tools?’ Witness called out, ‘To your left! make haste, or we shall be gone!’ Presently they heard

men using picks, and, after a long time, they saw a speck of light, and then a long stream of it, and then Mr. Frank, down as far as his shoulders, peering in on them. He said, 'You've had a narrow escape—fourteen are dead!''

There was a great deal more, about "brat-tices," and "cap-heads," "clack-doors" and "onsetters," that I did not understand or much heed. I only saw before me the gallant young man, "down as far as his shoulders," with his frank, glowing face peering in on the eager captives. I ejaculated, "Just like what one might have expected!"

"You know him, then?" said the gentleman, in reply.

"A little—we have met at the sea-side."

"I, too, have met him, but I know less of him from personal knowledge than report. His friend Jekyl I know well."

“What do you think of him?”

“Of Jekyl? He is an excellent fellow!—sure to distinguish himself. But he says Duncan has the better head and more presence of mind. You see, there were two perils in this instance—first, the foul air, which killed the fourteen men; but, secondly, the fire, which was just bursting out, when Duncan extinguished it by upsetting into it, with the assistance of his men, a vast heap of rubbish, which, at the same time, immured the other men whom he knew nothing of, and left them in darkness. He was asking for tools for a different purpose, when he heard them cry out for help, and immediately made a clearance for them. Then the other party, killed by the choke-damp, were found and sent up.”

Mrs. Meade looked wonderingly at me, and I felt my wits had indeed been strangely wool-

gathering, to need all this to be recapitulated. I should be ashamed to relate how many things had flitted across my mind. But the narrator had patience with me, and, seeing me really interested in the matter, went fully into it, and explained every hard word till I quite understood it. Then suddenly saying, "It is later than I thought!" he rose, shook hands with Mrs. Meade, spoke a few words to her on things that in no way concerned me, bowed to me, and was gone.

"Who was that nice person?" said I, when Mrs. Meade resumed her seat.

"Who?" said she, smiling. "Who but Mr. Mortlake! Did not you catch his name?"

No, I had quite missed it! How sorry I was! I seemed to be under a cloud, that day, doing everything that was stupid. How gladly I would have recalled more of his words, looks, and tones! But the light had

so faded that he had merely given me the general impression of a good-looking man ; his voice I liked, his manner was gentleman-like, and the sentiments he expressed were to my liking. As I uttered my disappointed negative, Mrs. Meade smilingly rejoined—

“ We were talking of you before you came in. It seems he met your sister Jacintha in Guernsey ; and he was sufficiently interested in her to listen with deep attention to all I could tell him of your successful school-keeping, and with unaffected concern to my account of your sad trials in the spring. All at once he changed the subject, took up *The Times*, and began, rather abruptly, I thought, to ask me if I had seen the account of the colliery accident.”

After some further conversation, I remembered it was getting late, and took leave, carrying *The Times* with me.

Directly Marian saw it, she seized it with

eagerness, her eyes sparkling like diamonds, and she hastily read out the account, and then uttered warm praises.

“ Noble—excellent young man ! ” said she.
“ Just like what I thought him ! ”

I left her to enjoy the paper by herself, and went to Jacintha. As she had accused me of being close in Marian’s case, I resolved to be explicit in her own, and therefore told her I had seen Mr. Mortlake. To my disappointment, I found myself again in a scrape. Her crimsoned cheek and brilliant eye, that lit up at the mere mention of his name, showed me that her interest in him had little diminished ; and, catching me by the hand, she begged me faithfully to tell her every word that had passed between us. When she found how little it amounted to, however, she looked miserably disappointed, and exclaimed with impatience and disgust—

“Is that all? How dreadfully flat! I really thought from your impressive manner that you had something interesting to relate! You are a most unsatisfactory person, Isabella! You never seem to know what to tell, nor what to suppress. For my part, I would rather never have heard the man’s name again, than in that sort of way!”

Here was a blow! To be taxed with my communicativeness!—and to be called “a most unsatisfactory person!” I felt humbled, but aggrieved.

CHAPTER XIV.

Fast as the periods from his fluent quill.

COWPER.

THE next morning I received a long letter from Mr. Jekyl, dated Cleaveskull-Tunnel Cottage (in my cottage near a wood, I suppose). He said he knew he owed me a hundred thousand apologies for having the audacity to write, but that a man who had tied a crab to a beautiful young lady's long hair, could not be supposed to be very acute in his moral perceptions; and that as I had testified such ("motherly" scratched out, and "sisterly" substituted,) sisterly interest in his friend and himself, even to lending them good books on Sundays, he thought I could not

be wholly indifferent to the fate of one of them, who had been recently on the brink of the grave, and was still very ill. He then gave a far more graphic and affecting account of the colliery catastrophe than *The Times* had done, proceeding to relate that Frank, in his personal exertions, had sustained some serious injury, which, at first, made his family very anxious about him, and that he was still invalided and unable to answer his friend's letters. Mr. Jekyl added, "Had his life been sacrificed, I know not how I could have borne the loss ;" and then went on to narrate, feelingly enough, their boyish intimacy ripening with their years. "He was always a brave, noble-hearted fellow," continued he, and he gave two or three traits, which made my heart glow. Then he returned to the calamity at Pendynas, and related how Frank's father had sympathized with the sufferers, and contributed

to their support. Some warm expressions of regret, that our short acquaintance had so soon closed, terminated the letter.

I gave it to Marian without hesitation. She read it again and again with eager interest; and, at last, asked permission to copy it, which I willingly accorded. I must say I was abundantly laughed at by Jacintha for having received this letter. She said sober people were the deepest—she had thought me too old for such things; what should I have said to Marian, had the letter been for her; and much more that it is needless to repeat.

Marian and I, however, felt we had a mutual understanding on the subject, and, secure of my sympathy, she spoke of it to me without reserve, expressing her unfeigned interest in Mr. Duncan's character and fate. And then she pursued "the daily round—the common task," just as usual.

I may as well acknowledge that I wrote a few lines of cordial thanks to Mr. Jekyl, and authorized him to present my and Marian's sincere condolences to his friend, when he wrote next.

Time went on: autumn was verging into winter; the days were growing very short, fires were resumed, the muffin-bell again tinkled in the streets; the ways were miry and sloppy; and the girls were talking of Christmas, when I heard again from Mr. Jekyl. "Frank" was better—nay, well; and was busied in contriving some new preservative against choke-damp, that he hoped might be as useful as Sir Humphrey Davy's safety-lamp. He had been delighted to hear that I and Miss Marian remembered he was in existence, and charged his friend with innumerable assurances of his being our very humblest and most devoted servant. Here this momentous correspondence ceased.

The holidays were close at hand, and we were looking forward to them with sober cheerfulness. The half year had been prosperous, and not more than usually fatiguing. We were making money, and could afford to spend a little in harmless recreation; but somehow we none of us seemed much inclined to stir from our own fireside, though we received very kind invitations from John and Laura.

“I think it will be very snug to spend this Christmas quite by ourselves,” said Jacintha. “What say you?”

“Oh, yes!” cried Marian, “I should like it so much!” And I felt the same. Afterwards I proposed an amendment, which was to invite John and Laura to spend the Christmas week with us; this would be sociable, and express a sense of kindnesses received. So on this we decided.

The invitation was made and accepted.

Breaking-up day came as usual, and, after a great deal of bustle, our young charges scattered right and left. Then came the lull, the repose, the cheerful chat, the calling on favourite friends, and receiving them at home ; the awaiting for John and Laura.

How pleasant it was preparing for that domestic Christmas ! With what satisfaction I selected my groceries, chose my poultry, reviewed my stores, and issued my orders ! With what cheerfulness my sisters adorned our rooms, chose their new dresses, and prepared little gifts for the servants and many an absent friend and poor dependent ! Marian had her own mince-meat jar, and her own stock of warm clothing to dispense to her own particular favourites ; Jacintha gave to fewer, but in a magnificent sort of way that was duly felt. As for me, it was surprising how much I muddled away in little gifts that made no

show after all: however, they were intended less for show than use.

The church-bells were ringing a merry peal, when a fly, containing John, Laura, and quantities of luggage, rattled up the drive to our door. Some of the things had to be taken out before they could alight—to wit, a noble turbot and barrel of oysters, a ham, a turkey, not so large as Mary Barnet's, but a fine turkey, nevertheless—and many other things. John looked handsome and cheery; Laura, all smiles, in the warmest and gayest of winter costume—rich black contrasting with bright crimson linings. It was a pleasant meeting! We had a very talkative dinner, and yet the viands were freely partaken of too—old family jokes and allusions that had slumbered for ages were remembered, and brought forth as good as new. Then the carillon players came and received their Christmas-boxes; then

sundry old women for plum-puddings and tea; then the mummers with St. George and the Dragon; after which, Jacintha and Marian gave us some of their best singing, and Laura played some lively airs, John and I sitting in state on each side the fire, as though we were the patriarchs of the family. He said aside to me, "Really, this meeting is a cloudless one—save for one sad remembrance." I echoed, "For one!" and sighed.

During the night, we were favoured with the waits; then came Christmas-day, bright and frosty; then, on the day following, we all went over early to the Barnets, and John went out with a gun. I don't know whether he fired it or not, but he did not bring home anything. No matter; our friends had already been too bountiful to us, and our larder was overstocked.

Thus pleasantly passed the week, and it

ended in Marian's returning to town with John and Laura, who were delighted with her, and treated her so pleasantly that she was quite won by them. Jacintha and I, during her month's absence, conducted ourselves like two sober, discreet spinsters as we were, and did a world of work and novel-reading, and had several sober, sociable tea-drinkings at home and abroad, besides dining twice with Mrs. Meade.

Meantime, Marian's letters were full of pleasure ; she had been to the Colosseum, the Diorama, the Polytechnic, to several picture-galleries and panoramas, to a concert, to the British Museum, and, oh, wonder of wonders ! she had there met Mr. Francis Duncan ! Laura had asked him to dinner—he had come, and the evening had been most delightful : he had told them the most interesting things ! John and Laura were charmed with him—he was

coming the next day, to accompany them to the Dulwich Gallery; he had promised them admission to one or two private collections, and it would be quite a privilege to have him for a cicerone, he talked so beautifully about pictures!

How Jacintha and I laughed! Jacintha looked on it as a settled thing that an engagement would take place before Marian returned; but I felt by no means so sure of it. I could not help a little hint or two in my letters, to which Marian replied very lightly and good humouredly, telling me I need not be afraid. Dear creature!

At last the month was ended, and she came back, bright and lovely as ever, and apparently with heart untouched. But she was not of the common sort; there was no artifice, no guile about Marian, and yet her very simplicity misled. One was apt to think "a girl cannot be

in love with one whom she so openly, innocently praises," yet that was by no means a sequitur. She thought of him, and talked of him a great deal; yet certainly not always—at times he was as completely out of her head as if he had never existed. She had evidently felt he liked her very much, but neither to have heard him say so, nor to have expected him to say more than he did. They had enjoyed each other's company very much indeed while it lasted; and when he left London before she did, she was very sorry for it, and that was all. Oh, Marian! why are there not more like you?

Ten days had thus passed, and she was uncomplainingly preparing to re-enter on her school duties, when, one morning, the post brought me a letter, evidently foreign, written in a strange, upright hand, mis-spelt, and mis-directed, so that "try" so-and-so, and "try" such-an-one, were endorsed on it by various

post-masters, and the wonder was that it ever reached me at all. I opened it with a strange misgiving—it was written in French, and to the effect that if any of Mr. Middlemass's family wished to see him alive, they must repair immediately to the *Boule d'Or* at Tours, where he was labouring under a brain-fever.

I instantly called a family-council. We all shed tears, and each was desirous to hasten to him. But it was promptly decided that only one could be spared; and I was pronounced too infirm and Marian too young, and in short Jacintha declared herself, and was reluctantly admitted, to be the proper person.

It was just such an emergency as to bring forth all her fine qualities. She thought with clearness and sense, arranged her movements, made her preparations with promptitude and no bustle, controlled her feelings, and, in an incredibly short time was ready to start by the

early coach, a place in which had been already secured.

Our cheeks were wet with tears as we fondly kissed her and strained her in our arms. The horn blew loudly, and she was soon rattling down the avenue. What a long day it seemed ! The wind was piercingly cold, the sky grey and cheerless, the house empty, its few inmates dejected.

Jacintha was to go to John in the first instance, get him to accompany her if he could and would ; and if not, proceed by herself. We thought he would hardly refuse, and it would sensibly diminish the troubles of her long journey.

The following morning we received the comforting intelligence that she had reached town safely, had seen John, had induced him to accompany her, and they were to cross that night. After that, we had a hurried line to

announce their safe arrival in France; after that, we did not hear for a good while.

Meantime, the school re-opened, and with heavy hearts we recommenced our duties; sensibly feeling our active, energetic sister's absence, and missing her at every turn. Miss Dixon, however, became increasingly valuable. She was a sterling character, though her parts were deficient.

One evening, Marian was in the school-room with the children, amusing them with some game, and I was sitting disconsolately alone in the twilight, thinking of Jacintha, and picturing "the worst inn's worst room," with my father, delirious, on a squalid bed, when I heard a slight rumour in the street. A chorus of small voices seemed in pursuit of some object, probably an unlucky dog or cat, which, at length, they appeared to have hunted into our avenue, and to be chasing up to the house. Worried

by their noise, I went to the window and saw a bevy of small urchins jibing and pointing with their fingers at a wretched creature, neither cat nor dog, but a poor, bewildered old man, who, in the dusk seemed to me to be a sort of "silly Billy," such as may generally be found straying about the purlieus of every country town, occasionally molested, as in this instance, by the ill-disposed and mischievous. I cannot endure to see such unfortunate persons baited and derided. I therefore tapped smartly at the window to attract the attention of the boys and send them away, but they were making too much noise themselves to hear mine. I therefore went hastily out into the hall and opened the front door, with the intention of speaking to them; but the instant I unclosed it, the poor victim of persecution rushed up the steps and tottered up to me, murmuring, "Oh, save me! save me!" while the boys, pointing and mock-

ing, shouted, "Silly Billy! silly Billy!" with fits of shrill laughter. It was my father!

Oh, I wonder how I lived! "Begone, all of you!" I fiercely cried, dragging him in, and slamming the door—then, fondling him, "Poor, poor old man! poor father!"

Hawkins was just entering the hall with a light, and seeing and hearing me, stood a moment in speechless amaze, and then hastened forward, white as death, to look him in the face. She knew him, directly; but oh! he was so altered!

"Why, Issy, is it you?" murmured he, looking up at me vacantly, "I thought it was!"—and burst into a silly laugh.

"The naughty boys hurt me so!"

I burst into tears.

Hawkins caught him in her arms. "He's too heavy for you, Miss Isabel," said she. (She had not called me by that name for years!)

“I’ll support him and guide him.—This way, sir,” speaking to him in the soothing tones of a nurse to a little child, and gently drawing him towards my sitting-room. He mechanically obeyed her guidance, as a child obeys the nurse.

At that instant, Marian, followed by Fanny Ward, was quickly leaving the school-room, when she saw us, and unable to make out what we were about, came hastily forward. I tried to put her back, fearing the effect of the shock, and said—

“Marian, it’s——”

But my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and I became wholly unnerved—unable so much as to put forth my hand. She darted at me a look of alarm, then looked full into my father’s face with dismay and terror, saw who it was, and fell to the ground like a stone.

I recollect poor Fanny's irrepressible cry, and her catching her up and ministering to her with strength and address far beyond her years, begging me to be assured she should want for no care, and all would go well, while I tended my father. Weeping, I complied, the instant I saw Marian's eyes uncloze: I hurried to him, and found him sunk all along on a sofa, Hawkins loosening his dirty, travel-worn clothes, and trying to raise his head a little. I slipped my arm under it, and begged her to fetch him a little brandy. We got a teaspoonful of it between his teeth, which seemed to revive him a little, but she told me his feet were stone cold, and very wet; so then I told her to get a footbath of hot water ready for him as soon as possible, and while she was gone I remained kissing and cherishing him. Oh, there is no love like that between child and parent!

Looking round, I was almost startled to see poor Marian, pale as ashes, but quite self-possessed, kneeling at his feet, drawing off his wet stockings, testing the heat of the warm water, and tenderly laving his feet in it. He evidently enjoyed the warmth and refreshment, and his features became less contracted; but there was still a look of helpless fear in his face, and he frequently shuddered all over. I said softly, "Do you know me, dear papa, do you know me?" He looked wistfully at me, but did not say—at length, whispered, "They must not know I am here—you must change my name."

Hawkins darted a look of intelligence at me. "He's right, Miss Isabel," said she. "We must call him by another name,—Mr. Smith, suppose,—or his foes will drag him from us. We must hush up his being here at all as much as we can, and those who *do* know it, must only

know him for a sick relation. *I'll* tell the servants, ma'am, with your leave—I know you will not like it."

I mutely nodded, while poor Marian looked pained and humiliated.

CHAPTER XV.

Cor. O my dear father!—Restoration, hang
Thy medicine on my lips! and let this kiss
Repair these violent harms!

SHAKSPERE.

I SENT for linen, &c., for my father to Mrs. Meade, whom I knew I could trust; and meanwhile had a little bed made up for him in the small room beyond my sitting-room, which had a chimney and fire-place, though chiefly used for stores. Hawkins, whose wits were all on the alert, soon made the little place quite neat and comfortable, with a clear fire burning in the little grate, and then we got him into it, and exchanged his worn, soiled garments for the fresh linen from Mrs. Meade. When comfortably placed in bed, he

drank a large cup of tea with avidity, then laid his head on the pillow, and fell fast asleep.

Marian, who had hovered about us, now stole in again, and after gazing on his withered face, while large tears coursed her cheeks, drew me into the sitting-room, and, saying she had accounted for her absence during the remainder of the evening to Miss Dixon, begged me to tell her all that had happened. When I had related the little there was to tell, "Poor Jacintha!" exclaimed she. "How alarmed she will be when she finds he is not at Tours! What will she do?"

"We must write to her," cried I; "and save to-night's post if possible. Do you write, if you can—I cannot."

Marian's pen flew over the paper, while I rested my aching head against the back of the easy-chair, and wondered how my father had

quitted Tours, what had been thought of him on the road, how he had paid his way, how he crossed the Channel, how he found his way to us, and a hundred other things, that would most likely for ever remain a mystery. Even should he recover, the probability was he would remember nothing, or little, of what had occurred while his brain was affected; and it appeared to me far more likely that he would never rally.

Before Marian finished her letter, I stepped in to him again; his temples throbbed so wildly, and he appeared so ill, that I desired the servant who took the letter to call at Mr. Herne's and request him to see me.

When he arrived, I told him the plain case, to which he listened with commiseration, and begged him to keep it quite between ourselves. He assured me, that as far as his own secrecy went, I might depend upon him, but he added that

the occurrence would certainly become known, and he even doubted whether it were wise or just to keep it concealed. However, he said, that was our affair, not his. He then went to my father's bedside, and looked very serious when he saw him. On returning to the sitting-room, he told us that he did not believe he could last long. He might live a few weeks, but was unlikely to recover. For his own sake, we must keep him as quiet as possible.

Hawkins sat up with him that night: I relieved her at five o'clock. The early post brought a letter from Jacintha, written in the greatest alarm, saying that the inn-people had removed my father, only partially recovered, into a poor lodging, where he was neglected, and whence he had escaped no one knew whither, nor seemed to have much cared, till John arrived and made a stir about it. She went on to say, "John and Mr. Mort-

lake—O Isabella! how strange that we should have met him by the way, travelling by night in the same diligence! He recognised my voice in the dark, and exclaimed, ‘Miss Middlemass! how strange!’ John, who was always very friendly with him, you know, was very glad to meet him, and told him our painful errand. He became quite interested in it, and gave us much information about Tours, and about French travelling, and many other things, of which we were sadly ignorant. When we reached the ‘Boule d’Or,’ he waited to hear the result of our inquiries, and, finding my father was not there, helped us to find the wretched lodging where he—*was not*. He was so much the best French scholar of the three, that he cross-questioned the people much better than we could have done, and took active measures for tracing my poor father, in which we should have been

quite at fault. He and John are now pursuing separate tracks, and will, I hope, bring me some tidings before long; but do not distress yourselves, my dearest sisters, more than you can help, as they may not come back till the post is gone out."

Poor Jacintha! she little knew that we were in more certainty than herself. How strange her falling in again with Mr. Mortlake! How consoling the course he had adopted towards her!

Meanwhile, there was all the routine of the house to be gone through; and I felt like a guilty thing, when I left my father in charge of Hawkins, and joined the family at prayers, as if nothing had occurred out of the usual course. I fancied some of the children looked at me strangely, and that Miss Dixon was constrained and uncomfortable. Afterwards, I heard one of the children at their play say

to another, "I fancied I heard a man's voice in the house during the night;" and her companion returned, "Nonsense! how could that be?" Hawkins told me that one of the under servants had heard some one at the greengrocer's mention that a mad Frenchman had been seen about the streets the previous evening, but appeared to have left the town.

Still, I went through the day like a bird with her head under her wing, that fancies no one can see her. My poor father demanded my continual watching; and when Hawkins or Marian relieved me a little, I placed myself as much in the sight of others as possible, that my long absences might be less apparent.

All in vain! A little girl had been sitting in the school-room window looking down the poplar avenue, just as my father ran up to the house. She saw him come in, but not go

out again; and though the noise her companions were making at blind-man's buff prevented her hearing what was being said in the hall, yet, when Marian and Fanny left the school-room, she caught a glimpse of me and Hawkins supporting him into the sitting-room.

I suppose she picked up things that were said about the house besides; for this little busy-body wrote home to her mamma that a strange man was in the house, and nobody knew. I never could descend to the littleness of reading the children's letters to their parents; consequently, on the third day, the mamma, who was no other than Mrs. De Wright, arrived in the stiffest of silks and the stiffest of manners, to investigate what she termed this mysterious affair.

I silently put into her hand the rough draft of a circular to parents, I was in the act of

drawing up, stating that the arrival of a near and dear kinsman, ill and from a foreign land, had necessitated my receiving him; and that though I did not see how it need interfere in the least with the school arrangements, I thought it best candidly to state the fact, that those who thought differently might remove their children if they liked.

Mrs. Wright acknowledged that this was all that could be expected of me; but added that, as the gentleman was ill, there was no knowing what his illness might prove to be, nor how it might terminate; and that, altogether, the affair appeared so odd, and mysterious, and uncommon, and uncomfortable, that she felt she should be more at ease in taking her little girls away.

I said "certainly," and rang the bell, and desired the Miss Wrights' boxes might be packed, and the Miss Wrights summoned from

the school-room. Miss Dixon told me afterwards that they slipped into the school-room again, kissed the girls all round, and whispered to them, "We're going away, because there's a man in the house." Of course, after this, there could be no concealment. I made the best of a bad matter when the De Wrights were gone, by calling the children around me, and saying, "My dears, there is an old gentleman come to stay with me, very nearly related to me, and from whom I received much kindness in my early years. He is very ill, and very much to be pitied: you will be sorry, I am sure, for him and for me."

"That we will," said Fanny Ward, speaking for all, while the faces of the others expressed silent assent, "and we will be as good as we can be, Miss Middlemass, to add as little as possible to your trouble while Miss Jacintha is away."

That model-girl, Fanny ! what a treasure she was ! The gem of the school.

The next morning, we received a sorrowful letter from Jacintha—they were still at fault, and I thought she even feared suicide. Our only consolation was, that by the time we received her letter she would have received ours. She was too unhappy even to name Mr. Mortlake : he was only comprised in the monosyllable “they.” The same post brought a very sympathising letter from Laura.

“Be consoled,” said I, cheeringly, to Marian, as she sighed over Jacintha’s sorrow, “they are on their way homeward by this time.”

My father had now recovered some degree of consciousness, and he certainly recognised us, but he said very little and in a querulous tone. There appeared to us very little connection in what he said. He seemed puzzled to know where he was, and not to understand or

believe our explanations. To our inquiries he was impenetrable.

By chance, Mr. Meade happened to travel part of the way to London with a fellow-passenger, who spoke of having come from town with a singular old gentleman, who seemed English, but spoke French, and seemed very ill. He added, that when they alighted at their journey's end, he proved to have no money about him, and the coachman, believing himself imposed on, became very abusive, on which the other became quite incoherent, and at length ran off. All this came round to me through Mrs. Meade.

We counted the hours that we thought must elapse before Jacintha could return to us. Ere they had expired, I stood in the gloom of twilight at the window, looking along the avenue, and almost seeming again to see my poor father hunted down it. All at once, a post-carriage

drove through the gates and up to the door: John sprang from it, then Mr. Mortlake, who handed out Jacintha, shook her hand warmly, spoke a few words, and then re-entered the carriage and drove off. Even in that moment, it flashed across me that they were engaged; but it was no time to dwell upon it, and the next instant my sister was in my arms.

We both shed tears; John, too, was much affected. "How is he?" he inquired, almost in a whisper. I replied, "He is sleeping—will you come in softly and see him?"

John tiptoed after me, as he had done formerly into Marian's room, and we stood together beside my father's bed. It was almost too dark for him to see him, and yet I feared a light might waken the sleeper. Some trifling noise, however, aroused him: he looked up, and hurriedly cried, "Who's there?"

I softly said, "John."

“John!” cried he: “who is John?” and began to utter strong invectives, that soon became incoherent, and finally exhausted him. All this was trying enough to John, who, having quietly waited till he relapsed again into slumber, stole noiselessly out of the room with me.

“Well,” said he, shrugging his shoulders, “the poor old gentleman will never be his own man again, that’s clear. What a dance he has led us! And to think of his finding his way here! I can’t make out how he managed it.”

Nor could we: it was the subject of vain discussion, and then he and Jacintha told of all their weary journey. While refreshments were being prepared, she went up with Marian to lay aside her travelling-dress; and John, unable to refrain any longer, leant towards me and said in an undertone, with an irrepressible smile—

“The lady is engaged!”

“I guessed as much!” ejaculated I. “How came it all to pass?”

Then John related how Mr. Mortlake had never ceased to think of her; how all that he had heard of her admirable character and conduct from Mrs. Meade had sunk into his heart; how he had been deeply interested in his short interview with me; how he had brooded on these things all the way up to London; how business had summoned him abroad, and he had fallen in with Jacintha and John in the diligence; how their travelling together led to long and communicative conversations; how the affecting object of her journey touched his heart and interested him in her welfare; how the dismay and distress into which she was plunged on discovering that her father was missing, engaged him in offering his best assistance in the pursuit; how

each unsuccessful effort and consequent debate what step should be taken next brought them yet more closely together ; how her tearful joy at the reception of my tidings overcame him altogether, and how he found opportunity to tell her his happiness was bound up in hers, and received no chilling reply. Leaving his business but half done, he resolved to accompany her safe home, and then return to accomplish it.

All this deeply interesting detail, which I was learning from John, Marian somehow contrived to hear in the meanwhile from Jacintha ; and when they returned to us with bright but tearful eyes and heightened colours, it was easy to see that we were all pretty much on the same footing with regard to the intelligence. The evening was one of mingled pleasure and pain : my father's case could call forth nothing but compassion and sorrow ;

but gleams of cheerfulness continually relieved our sadness when we thought on Jacintha's brightened prospects.

John slept at the "White Hart," but came to us the following morning. My father evidently knew him, but as evidently disliked his presence, and so painfully manifested it, that John withdrew, in compassion for both parties, observing that, as it was plain he could do no good and was not wanted, it would be best for him to return to town, where he really was needed. I asked him if he knew of any ground of complaint my father could have against him. He said, none; except that he had occasionally written to him for money, which he had never sent. It appeared to me that this sufficiently accounted for it.

John left us; and Jacintha immediately returned to her school duties. But our trials did not cease: Mrs. Wright had commu-

nicated her absurd fears to the mothers of three others of our pupils, who were consequently removed. Thus, five were taken away altogether, and only seven left. The school was again on the decline !

We all felt it; but Marian the most. Jacintha had all the pleasurable excitement of her engagement to the man of her heart, and the relief of writing to him; the consciousness of having acted extremely well in a trying emergency, and of having had due credit for it from her brother, sisters, and Mr. Mortlake. Marian had had no excitement, active exertion, or change of scene; her prospects had perhaps dimmed, certainly they had not brightened; her trials and labours had increased, her relaxations diminished; and a constant care and sorrow stood before her eyes and weighed on her heart.

My father now sat all day in an arm-chair

by my sitting-room fire. We troubled ourselves very little who knew of him and who did not. If the tidings of his whereabouts reached his creditors, we could not help it: there was no good in tormenting ourselves about it meantime. Everything seemed cheerless, but we would not despair; especially as John very handsomely offered to contribute his share towards my father's maintenance, and bade me apply to him in any emergency.

One day I received a letter from Mr. Duncan, or rather an envelope inclosing a letter, and containing only these words:—

“DEAR MISS MIDDLEMASS,

“Please give the inclosed to your sister. You really *must*. I can't stand it any longer!

“Faithfully yours, .

“FRANCIS DUNCAN.”

It was easy to guess what *it* was. I gave the inclosed letter to Marian. About an hour afterwards she came into my room, put her arm round my neck and wept.

“What can I do?” said she, after a long silence. “It is so pleasant to know he loves me; but he says he fears his father will not consent. And, in that case, Isabella, I suppose I *must* forbid him to think of it.”

“You may,” said I, smiling a little, “but I doubt his ability to comply.”

“Not literally, perhaps,” and she smiled too. I kissed her.

The letter, however, was written, and I know its tenour was dissuasory. But I fancy they were both happier for having spoken.

CHAPTER XVI.

If hindrances obstruct thy way,
Thy magnanimity display,
And let thy strength be seen :
But oh, if fortune fill thy sail,
With more than a propitious gale,
Take half thy canvas in !

COWPER.

WHEN a clever man resolves to do a thing, he generally does it—unless a still cleverer woman resolves he shall not. Now, Mr. Francis Duncan, having obtained a hearing, and an answer from Marian, resolved she should hear him and answer him again ; and thus she was drawn into a correspondence, which I, knowing the parties, believe to have been as harmless as it was interesting to them

both. Nay, to him there was doubtless positive good in it; for who could hold intercourse with Marian, especially when she was musing and praying over every letter she wrote, without being the better for it, and trying to emulate her pure thoughts and high aspirations? I believe Mr. Duncan emulated both; and yet found room for plenty of passionate remonstrance and entreaty, plenty of drollery too, which latter Marian did not churlishly keep to herself. I believe that, knowing the sad object constantly before her eyes, he thought he was doing her real service whenever he could elicit a smile or laugh; and this he continually did till my father's increasing illness made him all sympathy and no mirth.

It was a sad Easter. We were glad to have the house to ourselves even for a week; and John came down, and my father knew him, and they spoke kindly to one another, and

John's eyes were moist with tears. Mr Herne told us that the end could not be far off, and I almost wished it might be while John was with us; and I suggested to him how well it would be if we could all receive the Lord's Supper round my father's bed, while he was yet conscious and composed. John was startled a little, but assented; the more readily that I proposed asking Mr. Barnet to officiate. I wrote to him, and he came the following morning; but my father had become worse during the night, and was seemingly insensible. Mr. Barnet, however, thought he might perhaps catch some portion of the visitation service, which he proceeded to read aloud (the second time in that house), while we all knelt around. When he began the Lord's Prayer, my father, to our surprise and deep gratitude, joined him nearly to the end, and afterwards added to the benediction an em-

phatic "amen;" he then seemed indistinctly to murmur, "bless you all," and sank into a stupor, accompanied by stertorous breathing, from which he never awoke. We stood around him in reverent silence till the breathing ceased; then Mr. Barnet uttered (without book) the collect at the conclusion of the funeral service, in accents so subdued and touching, that each word distilled healing into our hearts—especially the almost persuasive tone in which he said, "as our *hope* is, this our dear *brother* doth." John's eyes rained tears, and Mr. Barnet gently led him away.

"I consider a scene of death," says John Foster, in his letters to Caroline, "as being to the interested parties who witness it, a kind of *sacrament*, inconceivably solemn, at which they are summoned by the voice of heaven to pledge themselves in vows of irreversible decision. Here, then, Caroline, as at the

high altar of eternity, you have been called to pronounce, if I may so express it, the irrevocable oath, to keep for ever in view the momentous value of life, and to aim at its worthiest use, its sublimest end."

Some such purpose, I think, was silently formed by John at this the first death-bed scene he ever witnessed. I have certainly discerned in him since, the elements of a higher, more thoughtful nature. That parent has not lived in vain, who, dying, draws his children closer, not only to himself but to heaven.

The funeral was over, the school reopened, all went on, outwardly, much in the same way, but with a depressed, languid feeling. I sometimes thought when I closed my eyes at night, that I should be very thankful never to open them on this world again. And yet I knew we had unnumbered blessings to be thankful for.

But the reaction was great, and I, who had had the most personal attendance on my father, felt it more than my sisters. Friends were very kind; they said we ought to have a change, and we looked forward to it at Midsummer; but the interval seemed so long!

At length it came. Jacintha was to pass it with John and Laura, and to make acquaintance with Mr. Mortlake's family. Her prospects were cheerful and even bright; but she would not accede to his wish of their marriage taking place till twelve months after the funeral. Jacintha was sometimes very quick-feeling; and she could not bear to cast the shadow of disrespect on the memory of a father whose claims on respect during the latter part of his life had been doubtful. Moreover, she felt for Marian and me, and said it would give us time to look about us and form our plans. For Jacintha had a strong impression that the school could not prosper without her; and

when we told her this was very conceited, she said, "Well, then, without her and Marian; and she was persuaded Marian would leave me to myself soon or late."

Marian said, "Late, if at all: certainly not soon;" and I said, "Soon or late, I know I could carry on the school in high style with Miss Dixon for my assistant, *and would.*"

Jacintha exclaimed, "Miss Dixon, indeed!" curling her lip. "Pretty school-keeping between you two!" but Marian eagerly interposed, "Oh, indeed, Jacintha, you never do poor Miss Dixon justice. There is a great deal of reliance to be placed in her, and she is thorough mistress of the routine, and her heart is quite in the concern. I am training her with the express view of becoming Isabella's right hand, and I am sure they will get on very well together. But, if not, Isabella shall live with you and me when we have houses of our own."

“Yes, unquestionably,” said Jacintha, giving me a cordial kiss. But I said, “No, no ; married couples are much better left to themselves. You shall never have an old maiden sister stuck up beside your hearth, except on a visit.”

“Old, indeed !” repeated Jacintha. “Why, Isabella, you are but thirty-six, and if you would not wear that horrid crape shawl and call yourself old, people would not think you so. Mr. Mortlake was quite surprised to find you set up for an old maid ; he said you had not the least pretension to it, and it was very conceited of you.”

“Conceited !” I repeated, bridling.

“Yes, conceited,” returned Jacintha, “for it is always conceited to try to appear what we are not.”

“Well, there is plenty of time to settle the question,” said Marian, cheerfully, “for I am not going to forsake Poplar House yet, I can tell you.”

Marian and I were engaged to spend the beginning of the holidays at Mr. Barnet's, and then to give a fortnight to Fishport, where I had very little doubt that Mr. Francis Duncan would, very much to his surprise! find us out. However, this arrangement did not take place. We were spending our time very happily at Mr. Barnet's, when Marian received a pressing invitation from *our* Mrs. Duncan, to visit her at Weymouth: and as we well knew that Mrs. Duncan was fully aware of her cousin Frank's attachment, and heartily sympathised with him in it, Marian's eyes brightened at the thought of being domesticated with a branch of his family, and she wistfully asked me if I should very much mind giving up our Fishport visit. I said—

“Not in the least! I cannot be happier than I am here. I have thoroughly congenial companions, in a pleasant house and charming

neighbourhood, and, if anything else be wanting, I shall find it in the knowledge that you and Jacintha are equally happy. Besides, I have something I want to write about, when I have a good deal of leisure, which never occurs ; so go by all means, my darling girl, with a light heart and clear conscience, and make yourself as many friends among the Duncans as you possibly can."

"I shall certainly *try*," said she, with a glowing look. "There will be no harm in it, will there?"

"Surely not. No harm, but much good."

"Well, I think so too. Dear Frank has shown such patience and forbearance, that if I can, by fair open means, smooth his path at all, I owe it to him—and the duty will be a pleasure," added she, laughing.

"Do you think any of his own family are likely to visit Weymouth?"

“Who can tell? Perhaps they may; I hope they will!”

So did I; for, in my opinion, to know Marian was to love her.

She looked so simple and elegant in her new and deep mourning—*not*

“With nip and snip, and cut and slish and slash,
Like to a censer in a barber’s shop”

(I hate such fripperies as much as Petruchio could do—especially in mourning), but graceful in its plainness—that even Mr. Barnet could not help commenting on her appearance with almost fatherly partiality; and a few minutes were spent in her praises, after we had returned her parting smile, that were very dear to a sister’s heart.

After she was gone, I said to Mary with a knowing smile, “Now, Mary, I am going to be tremendously busy in my own room!” And Mary archly replied, “I am very glad to hear it, dear Miss Middlemass, for I am going to be

equally busy with the clothing club." As for Mr. Barnet, he was already shut up in his study; so I repaired to my room, settled myself at my little davenport, placed a quire of Bath post paper before me, and with extreme complacency, prepared to write. What about?

It had entered into my wise head, that as Marian had been so well remunerated for her little magazine story, a much more lengthy work might produce a proportionably important consideration; and that nothing was wanting to my concoction of such a work, but leisure.

I quite forgot that Marian had genius and that I had not: that her new ideas bubbled up from an inexhaustible source, and that her pen therefore readily gave them a local habitation and a name; while mine were like a few drops of plain water in a jug, that were soon poured forth and exhausted. Consequently I was miserably disappointed to find that, with every

appliance at hand, no subject offered itself, and not a word could I say.

I thought, "Nonsense!—Nothing can come of nothing. Everything seems difficult at first, but becomes easier by practice. I will start off with matter-of-fact, and gradually interweave it with fiction; and then I can afterwards throw aside the beginning, and substitute something suitable in its place. Now then—Chapter I. That's easily written. I will rule a neat line under it. That's done. Now then. Hum!—"

Then it occurred to me that books opened well with dialogue. I had no idea of the market value of such things, but I thought I would take for my first effort, in three volumes, five hundred pounds. *Allons, donc!*

Dear me, how much dialogue my sisters and I talked, and how hard it seemed to write it! I thought I would try to recall one of our real dialogues, and set it down. Then I could alter

the names, &c., afterwards. I fell into reverie ; and mused on that eventful evening when we three sat round the fire and revolved the project of the school. I seemed to remember all that had been said.

“That will do !” cried I. And hastily resuming my pen, I wrote “Poplar House Academy” at the top of the page ; and then began with—

“How well I remember that evening !”

Just then, the luncheon-bell rang.

No matter. Having fairly started, I felt I could go on, and went down stairs in high glee. Directly luncheon was over, we separated again by mutual consent, and I resumed my entertaining employment. I wrote a whole chapter ; and then Mary came and said it was a shame we should stay in-doors any longer, and the poney chair was at the door.

The next day I continued my task, equally

to my satisfaction, but it seemed to be assuming a biographical rather than a fictitious character. Never mind! I was persuaded something would come of it; and, at any rate, I liked my amusement, and was at full liberty to pursue it. So I wrote, from day to day, till I made considerable progress in this veritable history.

Meantime, Marian wrote to say, "I played you a trick about Mr. Duncan, the first time I ever saw him, and now he has played me one. All his family were here—that is, in Weymouth—before Mrs. James Duncan invited me; and she did so at his instance, he making the express stipulation that she should not mention their being here, lest you or I should take some alarm, and the invitation should be declined! Now, we are seeing one another every day. I like Mr. Duncan, senior, very much; he is not in the least like what I ex-

pected him to be, but a frank-hearted, cheerful man, though I can suppose him to be, on occasion, a little choleric. Frank takes care not to give occasion, and behaves very pleasantly to his father. The two Miss Duncans are very pretty, ladylike, and friendly; the elder one has a look of mind, and a Spanish kind of face, such as Murillo loved to paint. We are all going on a boating-party presently."

This boating-party ended in a misadventure; they were out a great many more hours than they intended, on account of a squall coming on, and old Mr. Duncan was very uneasy. Two or three other little adventures and misadventures occurred: in short, something seemed always happening, to enliven Marian's letters. I only wished I could make my book half as interesting. But no! it became more and more of a true history; and I saw very

plainly it would never do to print ; but yet I went on writing.

The holidays ended too soon ! How happy we all three had been, in our several ways ! But yet, we would not linger with our favourite friends to the last, but preferred spending a few days with each other before our labours recommenced. I reached home first ; then Jacintha ; then Marian, looking lovelier than ever.

As soon as she had kissed us, she disengaged a small hamper from her luggage, and brought it to me, laughing.

“ There,” said she, setting it down at my feet, “ there is a present, for you, Isabella, from Frank, with his love ; and he hopes you will accept it, for *Auld lang syne*.”

“ I know what it is !” cried I. “ It’s a crab !”

“ And here,” said she, putting a book-parcel

into my hand, and kissing me, “is a little keepsake from me, in memory of your kindness in letting me go to Weymouth—‘Crabbe’s Poems!’”

CHAPTER XVII.

And all went merry as a marriage bell.

THE field had been won by sheer goodness and honesty. Old Mr. Duncan had seen enough of Marian to like her cordially, and to be content, since his darling Frank declared his happiness was bound up in her, to give his consent. She had returned home engaged, with the full approval and affection of his family; but she, like Jacintha, was resolute not to marry till our term of mourning had expired.

Cheerfully and quickly, therefore, fled the next half-year; and cheerfully and quickly fled the Christmas holidays, when we had a

family gathering, including Mr. Mortlake, Mr. Duncan, and—why not? Mr. Jekyl. The Barnets, also, were of the party; and I thought Mr. Jekyl seemed a good deal pleased with Mary.

Poor Fanny Ward had had a tearful parting with us. She had now shot up surprisingly, tall, and looking older than she was; and her parents thought her old enough to leave school. But Fanny begged hard for another half-year; and her parents, finding that Marian would be unlikely to be at Poplar House beyond that term, readily consented.

Fanny, therefore, was on the alert, to learn all she could of her dear friend before their parting, greatly encouraged thereto by the animating prospect of being Marian's bride-maid, and Marian's future guest. In fact, I thought she fagged too much for her health; but I knew it would not be for long.

*Meadowley Vicarage,
Thursday after Easter.*

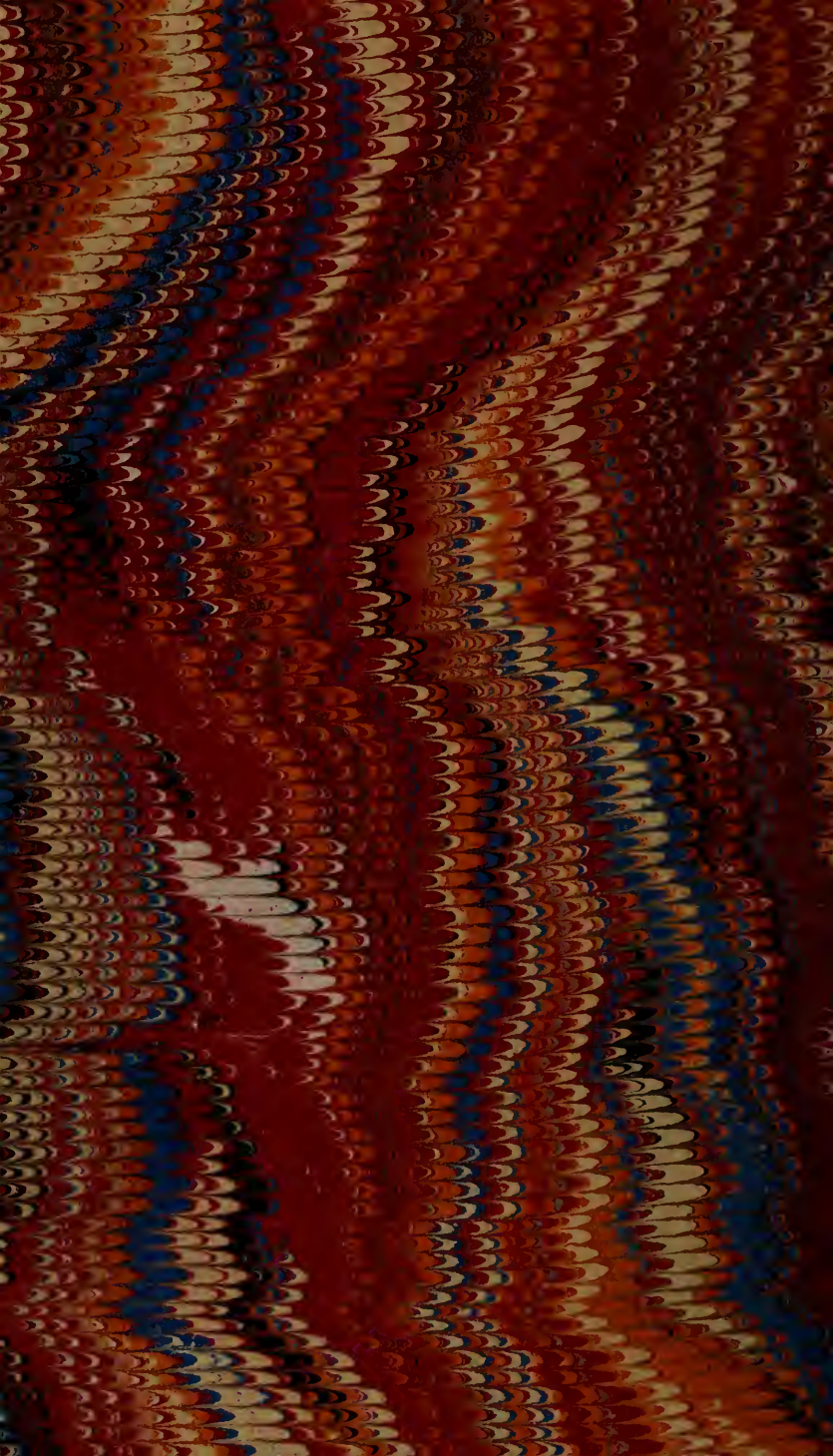
And now the double-wedding has taken place! Mr. Barnet himself officiated, and Mary Barnet and Fanny Ward acted as bridesmaids. The Miss Mortlakes and the Miss Duncans were included; the "White Hart" had overflowed with guests ever since Saturday, and now all have dispersed!

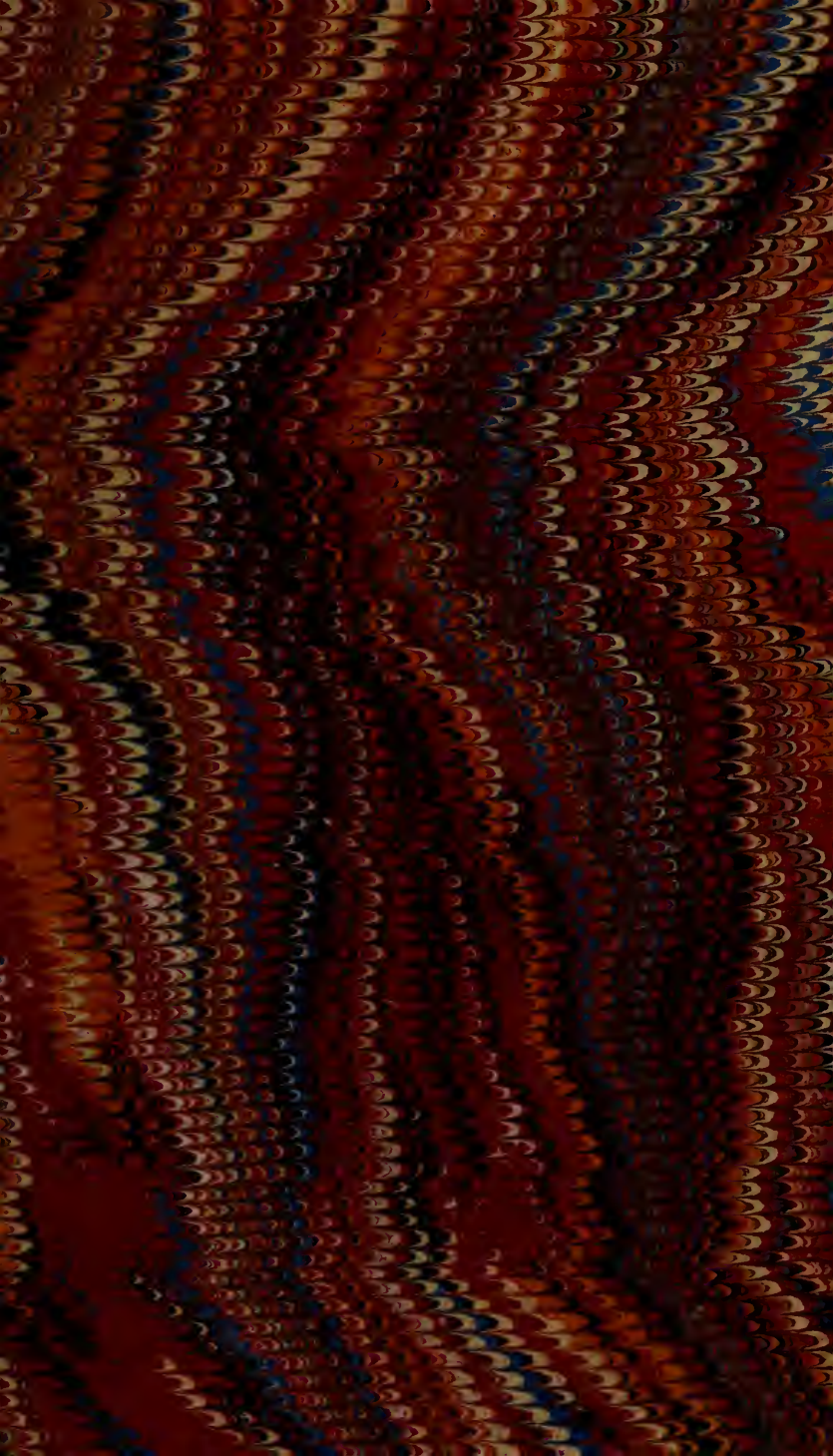
Jacintha and Mr. Mortlake have gone to Switzerland, where they will proceed to Italy. Mr. Duncan and Marian will join them at Como. John and Laura return yesterday, and I came here to town to-morrow. I have promised my next visit shall be to them.

Meanwhile, Miss Dixon and I shall get on as well as we can till Midsummer. *After* that, we shall see what we shall see. It is doubtful whether I shall carry on the school—in fact

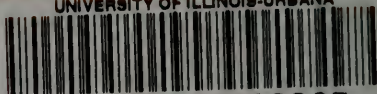
it is pretty certain I shall give it up to Miss Dixon and a niece of Mrs. Cole's. It will be my own fault if this sweet vicarage is not, thenceforth, my permanent home. We shall see !

THE END.





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